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# THE STORY OF THE CULTURAL EMPIRE OF INDIA



BY P. THOMAS

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# THE STORY OF THE CULTURAL EMPIRE OF INDIA

A SURVEY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN CULTURE AND  
ITS EXPANSION ABROAD

*by*

**P. THOMAS**

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FIRST INDIAN EDITION

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**TO MY SON RAJAN**



## PREFACE

WHILE there is no dearth of books dealing with the cultural history of India, it is difficult to find a handy volume giving the general reader a connected account of the development of Indian culture and its expansion to South East Asia and the Far East. Scholarly works there are, which deal with Indology in South East Asia, but these seldom reach the lay reader. Hence this work is mainly intended to serve as a handbook for the layman interested in the culture that developed in India and, spreading outside, enriched the civilisations of the north and east.

While the history of India prior to the Muslim conquest is something of a patchwork sewn out of accounts of travellers, stray inscriptions, speculations of archaeologists and meagre references in indigenous literature, that of the countries of South East Asia is even more scrappy. The archaeologist and the epigraphist are only now beginning to unfold the history of these regions, and our knowledge of the races and cultures of South East Asia, prior to the arrival of the Europeans in this region, is based on stray references in Chinese annals and inscribed eulogies of kings which are poor records of historical facts. Hence the present work is more of a story intended to evoke interest than a sound work on history.

A detailed treatment of the subject in a book like this is practically impossible as it involves the history of a dozen countries, each of which capable of claiming a volume. Hence a bare outline of Indian cultural development and its expansion abroad is all that is attempted here.

As far as India itself is concerned, the emphasis is on those developments that had an international appeal; for instance, Jainism may be more important to present day India than Buddhism in as much as the former has a large following in India and the latter practically none, but since Jainism never spread outside India to any appreciable extent, I have mentioned little about this religion in the book and a good deal about Buddhism.

The cultural expansion of India practically ceased with the Muslim conquest of the country, which was, in consequence, isolated from her ancient cultural commonwealth; as such I have made no efforts to pursue in any detail developments in or outside India after this event.

\* \* \* \*

A list of the more important of the works I have consulted will be found in the bibliography appended to the book. I have also drawn freely from several of my own articles published in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, and *March of India*, New Delhi, and my apologies are due to the Editors of these journals for the liberty I have taken. Finally I must acknowledge the help I received from Mr. P. A. Joseph for reading the proofs and Mr. N. V. Andrew for preparing the index.

**P. Thomas**

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**PART I**

**DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN CULTURE**



## CHAPTER I

### THE BEGINNINGS AND THE BACKGROUND

CONCERNING the origin of life on earth there are several theories, none, however, universally accepted. The religious view, generally stated, is that the Deity created the world and the living beings in it, and He will, after a definite period, dissolve it into the chaos or nothing from which it was created. Further, all religions teach us that man, when first brought into being, was perfect or nearly so, that our ancestors were less wicked, had better build and enjoyed greater longevity than we; further, that mankind is steadily degenerating and in course of time the world and its creatures will come to a sudden, catastrophic end. This view, still widely held, belongs to the realm of belief and dogma, but is not entirely without value on that account; for the generality of men, though not very deep in religion, are guided in these matters by priests, monks and other religious teachers.

The theory of evolution to which scientists and rationalists are partial, is diametrically opposed to the religious view. The evolutionists maintain that the world is not degenerating but progressing; and that our ancestors were not only less civilised than we, but were not humans at all. Some 1,000,000 years ago, they tell us, there were no human beings on earth but only wild creatures of varying size and shape, the bigger type known as dinosaurs, all struggling for existence and fighting one another for survival; and out of this tension was produced the ape and from ape man. The process is not yet ended; for man by a conscious and subconscious process is steadily improving himself, and completely conquering his environments may, in course of time, become as good as what the religious call angels or gods.

The potentialities of nuclear weapons are, however, making even ardent protagonists of evolution take a

somewhat gloomy view of the prospect before *homo sapiens*. Apart from this, there is a weak link in the chain of evolution. For while it is undeniable that there is a natural tendency in every form of life to improve itself by adapting itself to or by fighting its environments, when we trace back the progress of life through the millenia we are inevitably driven to a position wherein we have to accept that in the beginning dead matter produced life. The evolutionists try to get over the difficulty by the bald statement that in millions and millions of years this happened. But in this assertion they merely invest Time with the powers the religious attribute to the Almighty. For it is difficult to comprehend how dead matter, no matter how long it might rot, could produce even simple forms of life, and there are famous scientists who doubt its possibility.

It is really a pity that we, who are planning to invade the moon and Mars do not even know whether we are progressing or degenerating. But in such difficult matters as to what constitutes good and evil, right and wrong, aims and objects of life, the progress made by man for the last twenty five centuries is negligible, and humanity still clings helplessly to ancient stalwarts like Moses and Isiah, Mahavira and the Buddha, Lao Tse and Confucius, Socrates and Zoroaster, Jesus Christ and Mohammed.

To be quite frank, we do not know how the universe originated and how it will end. Perhaps, we may never know, human intellect being incapacitated by its own limitations to solve the riddle of the universe. But we know with a fair amount of certainty that our ancestors, some ten thousand years ago lived a very different way of life from ours. They had no hydrogen or atcm bombs and when they fought used fists and sticks at close range, and slings and arrows at long range. They had no aeroplanes, steam engines, motor cars or electricity; they did not know how to build cities and towns or even decent houses, but lived in caves, crude tents or huts made

of leaves and reeds. They had no need for permanent residence too, for they were nomads or wanderers who lived mainly by hunting, and generally followed the wild animals when these moved from forests to forests. The advantages of joint action were, however, obvious to these primitive hunters as to the animals, and they usually moved out in groups; when rival groups met, the tendency was to fight rather than to combine for better action.

### EGYPT

The rise of civilisation is connected with the settled life made possible by the invention of agriculture. Agriculture requires a regular supply of fresh water, and in an age when the art of deep well digging was unknown, the rivers were the main sources of perennial water supply. Moreover, the rivers had an advantage for agriculture which the lakes lacked. The seasonal inundations of rivers caused by rainfall or snowmelting at the sources, usually left a rich deposit of alluvial soil in the flooded regions and when the waters receded, this soil was best suited for raising crops. Hence we find that ancient civilisations had their rise in the great river valleys of the world; in the Nile valley, in the Tigris-Euphrates region, in the Indus valley and in the basin of the Yellow River.

The earliest of these ancient civilisations of which we have a connected account was Egypt in the Nile valley. Coeval with the Egyptian, there were possibly well developed civilisations in the Tigris-Euphrates region, the Indus valley and the Yellow River basin, but in Egypt we get monuments and a fairly well preserved literature that gives an account of the peoples of Egypt from about 5,000 B. C. onwards which, as far as our present knowledge goes, no other race has left us.

The origin of these ancient Egyptians is obscure; they were in all probability Negroid immigrants from the



highlands of Ethiopia or nomads from the west (the present Sahara desert) who retreated before advancing desert and settled down in the Nile region; for it is now ascertained that the Sahara was once a fertile, inhabited region which was gradually turned into desert due to constantly diminishing rainfall.

The Egyptians were in a favoured position to develop their civilisation without much outside interference. Cut off from Asia by the marshy delta of the Nile which prevented nomad incursions from the north for centuries, the settlers on the Nile region developed agriculture, irrigation and allied arts and sciences without any disturbance. The control of the Nile meant large scale organisation of labour, and her seasonal inundations, careful watching and close study of the cycles. The leaders who organised the people for irrigational work, and the brainy men who watched the changing position of the sun, the waning and waxing moon, and the course of the stars in the heavens and the effect of these on the fluctuations of the river became, in course of time, the most important people among the settlers. Further, the star gazers did not stop with the study of astronomy and the annual cycles, but started speculating on the mysterious regions of the stellar plane, of possible beings that could inhabit those regions and of the souls of men that could make light of distance and ascend to the worlds beyond the moon and the stars. These men combining with the leaders who organised the people for the control of the Nile waters developed into a theocracy at the head of which was the priest king who bore the titular name of Pharaoh.

A religious belief that had a far reaching effect on the life of the people of Egypt and inspired the major part of their building activities was the dogma of resurrection. Every person was believed to possess a soul that escaped into mysterious regions on his death but returned to his body after its wanderings. The dead, the Egyptians believed, would resurrect in their own physical bodies,

and it was considered important to preserve the body so that the soul on its return should find it habitable. An elaborate system of mummifying dead bodies by embalming developed in Egypt and with it the art of building suitable structures for entombing the mummies.

Further, the body on resurrection would naturally require the good things of the world, and it was customary with the Egyptians to bury with the mummies what the living could give the dead. The poor buried clay pots and utensils, bowls of grain, trinkets etc. and raised mounds of plastered mud for tombs, while the wealthy had much gold and silver vessels, jewels, furniture and even pack animals and slaves buried in the brick or stone structures that entombed the mummy.

There were, however, unconventional people in Egypt who thought that the dead did not require all this paraphernalia which the living could put to better use. These wicked men stole at night, desecrated the tombs and ransacked their contents. It was to prevent this sacrilege that the pyramids were built. Every Egyptian vied with one another in erecting these tombs, and the wealthy and powerful built strong stone structures which robbers could not easily break open, while the Pharaohs, not leaving anything to chance, built their tombs in their own life time spending most of their wealth and time on the construction of these rest houses of resurrection, compared to which their kingdoms and palaces appeared transient and insignificant. The greatest of these Pyramids was that of Pharaoh Khufu or Cheops which still stands in the desert to the wonder of the world. Built about 2885 B. C., it is more than 450 ft. in height and the base 750 ft. on each side. Solid to the core except for a few maze like passages, the weight of stone used on this pile is 4,883,000 tons. Not much of a beautiful structure from an architectural point of view, but for sheer brute strength there is little in the world to equal it, especially when we consider that the stone had to be brought down the Nile in

boats and there were no power driven machinery and cranes to lug them into place. The pyramid of Khufu has been standing in the desert for the last 48 centuries, and may possibly be standing long after the great cities and monuments of the moderns will have perished and disappeared in the womb of time.

The Egyptians were probably the first to invent writing. Primitive writing was essentially in picture. To indicate an object, the Egyptian scribe drew a picture of the object; while nouns were comparatively easy to represent by pictures, the verb was more difficult but by an ingenious combination of meanings and sounds, the Egyptians managed to develop a script, known as hieroglyphics, which was fairly sound for conveying ideas by visible means.

#### SUMERIANS

About the time the Egyptians had settled down in the Nile valley, nomads from the north were settling down to agriculture in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, the region known to later generations as Mesopotamia. The earliest of these settlers of whom we have a fairly good account were the Sumerians. Archaeologists have now discovered that the Sumerians were northerners who had conquered this region from a mysterious people named Eridu of whom little is known except the name. The Sumerians were not allied to the Egyptians or the Semitic nomads of whom we shall deal presently, but had considerable affinity to the Indus valley people, and some scholars are even of opinion that Sumerians were immigrants from India.

The Sumerians have left us much literature. Their writing too was in picture language. They used clay blocks and wedge-shaped wooden styles, and hence the Sumerian script is known as cuneiform. Their writing has been deciphered and we know a good deal of their

history and way of life. They had developed irrigation and legal codes. The Sumerians were not under a single ruler, but were divided into several city states, and these were often at war with one another. An inscription at Nippur records the success of the Sumerian city of Erech and the extension of the sway of its ruler right down to the Red Sea.

Unlike the Egyptians the Sumerians have left us no great buildings in stone. They do not seem to have believed in the resurrection of the dead, but had a religion of spirit worship. Their chief deity was a mountain spirit, which would indicate that they were originally the inhabitants of some hilly regions. In Sumeria there were no hills and hence they built large towers of considerable height in their cities for their god to dwell.

#### THE INDUS VALLEY PEOPLE

While Khufu was building his pyramid in Egypt and the cities of Sumeria were fighting among themselves for supremacy, there flourished in the Panjab and the Indus valley a civilisation which in its refinement was as good as that of Egypt or Sumeria if not better. This civilisation, the first so far known in India, is called Mohan-jo-daro or Harappa culture because of the two cities unearthed in Sind (Mohan-jo-daro) and the Panjab (Harappa). But unfortunately we know much less about this ancient Indian culture than we know about the Egyptians and Sumerians. For one thing, the unearthed cities have not so far yielded much by way of literature, and for another the writing on the numerous inscribed seals discovered has not been deciphered.

From available evidence it would appear that the Indus valley people had greater affinity to the Sumerians than to the Egyptians. Mohan-jo-daro and Harappa have not left us any temples, and the fragments of their art that we have discovered do not appear to be of any great

images. The largest single building so far unearthed at Mohan-jo-daro, believed to be a palace, has only a floor area of 230 by 78 feet.

But the cities of the Indus valley seem to have been more democratic and the people as a whole more happy than the generality of Egyptians. The citizens had clean well-ventilated houses with courtyards. In town planning, in laying out streets and drainage channels, in constructing baths and swimming pools, these Indus people were even more advanced than their contemporaries in Sumeria and Egypt. The city had a fortified citadel where the ruler and the nobles lived; the common people do not seem to have been oppressed, for even labourers lived in two-roomed tenements of the cottage type. The Indus folk were agriculturists and their main crops were wheat, barley, peas, sesamum and possibly rice. They had domestic animals too, bulls and cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep, pigs, asses and dogs. They were, it would appear, the first among the ancient peoples to tame fowl and use eggs. They knew how to cultivate cotton and their garments were made of cotton and wool.

The Indus people were artistic. They had painted pottery, toys of wood, bronze and clay, ornaments and trinkets of beads and conch shells. Their art was a well developed one, and the human and animal figures as well as the representations of deities show remarkable skill in workmanship and a sound sense of aesthetics. One of the art treasures discovered at Mohan-jo-daro is of a young girl, possibly a dancer, and this would indicate that they had cultivated histrionics as well.

No temple has so far been discovered, and it may be that their religion like their social and political organisations was more individualistic than national. Many seals bearing figures of horned gods and goddesses, of saints sitting cross legged, and of sacred animals have been discovered along with stones believed to be phallic

emblems. This has led many scholars to conclude that Linga worship, Tantric cults, and the Yoga of Puranic Hinduism had their origin in Mohan-jo-daro. But in the absence of better evidence it is wiser to defer judgement as scholars are often led astray by imagination where evidence is weak.

A peculiar feature of the Indus valley civilisation was the widespread use of seals with inscriptions and figures believed to be of deities. The script on these seals has not so far been deciphered, but each family seems to have had a distinctive seal of its own. To what exact purpose these seals were put, is not known; possibly they were used as charms. Over two thousand of these seals have been discovered in the cities of Mohan-jo-daro and Harappa.

The Indus valley people had commerce with the outside world. They seem to have traded with the cities of Sumeria both by land and sea. Representation of boats has been discovered at Mohan-jo-daro, but this is of small size boats used in crossing the river and not of sea-going vessels. Anyway maritime trade seems to have been brisk all along the coastal region from the Persian Gulf to Cape Comorin, for according to some writers, "the analysis of the different products discovered in Mohan-jo-daro has shown that many of them including gold came from the extreme south of India and could have only been transported by sea."

All told, the Indus valley people, though less imaginative in religion than the Egyptians, less inclined to spend their time and money on stupendous structures either for gods or for kings and nobles, lived more comfortable lives in their neat little cottages, and in unpretentious but spacious public buildings.

The extent of the Indus valley civilisation has not yet been ascertained with precision. It was certainly prevalent

in the Panjab and Sind, Baluchistan and part of Rajputana. Whether or not it was also dominant in the Gangetic plain and South India during the heyday of its expansion is not known, but scholars have discovered close affinities between the Mohan-jo-daro people and the Tamils and call their civilisation Dravidian. The discovery of striking similarities between Tamil and the dialects of the Brauhis, a Baluchi tribe, lends considerable support to the claim of the Indus valley civilisation to be called Dravidian.

If we know little about the origin of Egyptians and Sumerians, we know even less about that of the Indus valley people. They might have been of the same stock as the Sumerians with a common homeland this or that side of the Hindu Kush; or they might have been some primitive seafarers who settled down in South India and built up a civilisation which spread to the north; or possibly they were some Central Asian nomads who settled down in the Indus region, built up a civilisation of their own and pushed east and south as the Aryans did later.

Nor do we know how the Indus valley culture came to an end. Some scholars hold the view that its fall was brought about by the Aryan outburst from Central Asia towards the close of the second millenium B. C. The Indo-Aryan literature itself provides no clue to this, and many historians are inclined to the view that there was a wide gap between the fall of the Indus valley civilisation and the Aryan conquest, a gap filled by nomad outbursts from the northwest, of wild people who had no literature and have left us no monuments or records of their destructive activities. Of the Aryan outburst into the settled civilisations of the time and its effect on world history in general and of Indian history in particular, we will have to deal presently. In the meantime we may take some notice of the nucleus from which the Chinese civilisation rose.

## CHINA

Nomads from somewhere had settled down in the Yellow River basin when the Indus valley civilisation was in a flourishing state. These settlers were either of Mongolian extraction, of the same stock that had wandered in the steppes and lake regions of Asia from time immemorial, or primitive seafarers from the south who had taken to agriculture and a settled life.

From what we can gather from the legends and early accounts of the Chinese, the men who built up their civilisation were inventors of the plough and hoe, great engineers who tamed the fury of the rivers by irrigation and used the waters for growing millet and other crops. According to *Shu-Ching*, the book of history edited by Confucius in the sixth century B. C. civilisation started in China with the reign of a trio named Yao, Shun and Yu. Yao, who is believed to have started his reign in 2145 B.C. is remembered among other things for his compassion for the people. One of the favourite sayings attributed to him is: "I hunger with all my hungry subjects, and am cold with all who are cold; with the oppressed, I suffer oppression." Thus, the ideal of altruism which was considered the prime quality of rulership in ancient China was already developing with its first hero. Yao's successor Shun was equally good but the most important of the trio from a practical point of view was Yu. He was a great engineer; cutting through nine mountains he is fabled to have produced nine rivers which watered all the land and brought it under cultivation. He had fighting qualities as well and successfully fought against the wild tribes who were harassing the borders of China. All this would indicate that China was developing an agricultural civilisation and putting up a constant fight against the nomads who were assailing her from the north and west.

The first dynasty founded by Yao lasted for about two hundred years and is known in Chinese legend as the



Hsia or 'Civilised'. From now on China started her cultural march which was later to develop into a distinctive civilisation which spread to most of the nations in the Far East, to Korea and Japan, Manchuria and Annam.

The Chinese too invented the art of picture writing by the second millenium B. C. Their writing, it is interesting to note, developed along the same lines, and Chinese (and its cognates, of course) is the only language in the modern world which uses a picture script. For while hieroglyphics and the cuneiform script were eventually given up in favour of the phonetic script we use today, the Chinese continued to use their ancient script which underwent no radical change but only modification during the course of the centuries. The Chinese script has certain advantages along with disadvantages; for a man in North China may talk a language different from the one in the south, but they write the same language and easily make themselves understood on paper though not by speech. The idea will become clear on illustration: The Arabic numeral 10 may be differently read the world over, but when written becomes intelligible to all.

When compared with the civilisations of Egypt, Sumeria and India, the Chinese civilisation developed more or less in isolation. The Sumerians and Indians had direct commercial and possibly political contact with each other, and Egypt was dragged into Asian political conflicts in the beginning of the second millenium B. C. when She was conquered by the Hyksos. But China from the very beginning of her civilisation remained isolated from the rest of the civilised world, because of the arid regions of Gobi and the hostile tribesmen who roved mid-Asia. So, till the Hans, in the second century before the Christian era, in an effort to subdue the tribes on the western frontiers, established contact with Central Asia, the history of China is more or less a continued tale of

internecine conflicts relieved by desperate efforts to keep the nomads off her borders.

#### THE EMPIRES OF THE SEMITES

While the agricultural communities who had settled down in the river valleys were building up civilisations, the nomads had not been idle. Their hunting habits gave them better acquaintance with the habits of wild animals, and their wanderings better opportunities for understanding different lands and peoples. They tamed wild animals for meat and for transport; they were the first to use horses for war. In course of time the wealth of the nomad began to be counted in flocks of sheep, cattle and horses and in tents and slaves. Some of the nomads had developed into tribes connected by ties of blood with distinctive social organisations, and they had well marked regions for their wanderings, and encroachments by alien tribes usually led to war. These tribal wars destroyed the weaker peoples while the victors gradually became unwieldy, and a good number of them settled down in congenial regions and took to agriculture; the wander lust, however, was strong in their blood, and even the agricultural tribes moved out in familiar regions after collecting their harvest, using pack animals for transport of grain.

By about 3,000 B. C. there were in Asia some powerful groups of these semi-settled nomads. The Semites occupied the major part of Arabia (which in those days was less arid than at present) and the regions west of the Tigris-Euphrates region; immediately to the north of the two rivers were the Elamites. In the steppes of Asia were the Hunnish or Mongloid nomads moving round the borders of China. Between the Elamites and the Mongloids wandered nameless nomads, while in northern Europe were the Nordic races who roved the forests of thist region.

The Semites were the forefathers of the Arabs and the present day Jews, but they were a very different people, caring little for monotheism and worshipping strange gods and indulging in human and animal sacrifices to their blood thirsty gods. The Elamite perished in the struggle for empires and to us is nothing more than a name. The Mongloid nomads roved the steppes and highlands of mid-Asia for centuries and during several epochs in world history threatened to annihilate civilisations in Asia and Europe but eventually settled down to civilised ways of life in several parts of the world. The Aryans who were later to play an important role in world history were not heard of in 3000 B. C. but were, in all probability, some insignificant tribe that moved round the Caspian region and lived in mortal fear of stronger nomads.

These nomads in their wanderings began to get some knowledge of the settled civilisations of the river valleys with whom they had probably developed trade by bartering domesticated animals, leather and wool for grain, cotton and garments. Some of them at least thought well of the comforts enjoyed by these city dwellers, their wealth and pomp, their temples and idols, rituals and dances, gold and precious stones. It was difficult for the nomad to build those temples, forts and palaces in their wild country where no one knew the art of building, but he could try to drive out or kill the occupants of the cities and take possession of these desirable luxuries. So the nomad started regular wars on settled civilisations. At first the odds were against the nomad. The city dwellers had superior arms and organising ability, and their forts, ramparts and moats gave them better advantage in defence. But the nomads had a permanent advantage over the city dwellers; a defeated army of nomads could never be completely captured or annihilated, but always disappeared into terrain inaccessible to their enemies only to come back unexpectedly and resume the war.

On the other hand, once a settled civilisation was conquered, the conquerors were in full possession of the country, its people and their wealth. Eventually this advantage, coupled with the superior hardiness of the nomad decided the fortunes of all long-drawn out wars in favour of the nomad. The story of mankind, from the beginning of civilisation till the last of the great nomads, the Mongols, took to a settled life in the thirteenth century of the Christian era, has been a long tale of this conflict between settled civilisations and the nomads.

About 2750 B. C. a branch of the Semites known as Akkadians conquered Sumeria under their leader Sargon. These Semites proved themselves great empire builders. Having had a good knowledge of different peoples and lands, their customs and manners, the nomad was better equipped for empire building than the city dweller with his limited knowledge of men and country outside his native land. Sargon and his people were much less civilised than the Sumerians; they were illiterate and did not know much about building and irrigation. But they were an industrious people and learnt writing and other arts from the Sumerians and embarked upon a career of conquest. Sargon's empire extended from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean. From now on the age of empires started.

The Akkadians were overthrown by the Elamites and these in turn were conquered by the Amorites, a branch of the Semites, who built their capital in Babylon, an up river town of the Tigris-Euphrates region. The empire of the Amorites was greater than that of Sargon, and a great Amorite ruler named Hamurabi consolidated the conquests of his predecessors and made Babylon the greatest city of the contemporary world. It was a centre of international commerce, rich and powerful, where the arts and sciences flourished. Its inner walls were over forty miles in length and, if we are to believe ancient

writers, it was more like a nation than a city. Hamurabi was a wise ruler and his code of laws was an inspiration for many races and has come down to us almost intact. The influence of Hamurabi not only on the Amorites but even on later dynasties and empires is thus attested by a modern writer; "The code itself remained in force well on into the Christian era, and influenced subsequently the laws of the Mohammadan conquerors of the East. The Babylonians already stand forth as a civilising force in Western Asia; their language, currency and measures of weights prevailed over all East; their women enjoyed a legal status of dignity and a man could ride in safety from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean under the protection of the Laws of Hamurabi."

About Hamurabi's time (2100 B. C.) Egypt began to get disturbed in her age-long isolation by Semitic outbursts from the Arabian region. A branch of these expanding Semites, known in Egyptian history as Hyksos or shepherds because of their great flocks of sheep, finally conquered Egypt. These Hyksos did not make Egypt their home, but ruled over the Egyptians as alien overlords, somewhat like the British who ruled India. About the year 1600 B. C. the Egyptians revolted successfully and drove the Hyksos out of their country. This resurgent Egypt was not merely on the defensive, but was of an aggressive temper, determined on retaliation and carrying the war into the enemy's country. And the Egyptians, for the first time in their long history crossed the northern marshes into Asia. From now on the history of south west Asia and north Africa becomes one.

The Egyptians in their northward advance were met by a people known as Hittites. Whether the Hittites were Semites or settlers from the north we do not know. But they had built a sizable kingdom west of the Tigris-Euphrates region and successfully fought the Egyptian expansion mainly because of the excellence of their

weapons. For they were the first to use iron weapons and the superiority of this metal over the older ones gave them a definite advantage over their enemies.

By about 1300 B. C. the empire of Hamurabi and his successors had fallen and the Assyrians took possession of Babylon. These Assyrians were nomads of Semitic origin who had settled down north of Babylon during Hamurabi's time. The Assyrians learnt the use of iron weapons from the Hittites and started using cavalry units for war as they came in possession of large number of horses from northern nomads and learnt the art of breeding them. Thus better equipped than the nations of the contemporary world, they started their career of conquest. After capturing the empire of the Amorites and learning from them what suited them, the Assyrians expanded the frontiers of their kingdom and built the city of Nineveh as their capital. The Assyrian empire reached the zenith of its power under Esarhaddon in the eighth century B. C. when it extended from Persia to Lybia and included part of Asia Minor and the Island of Cypress. Esarhadden kept a standing army in order to curb rebellion in the Empire and forestall attack by aliens.

Most of the historians of the present day tell us that the Assyrians were the most blood thirsty and ferocious people of the ancient world. The basis for this assumption is the inscription of an early Assyrian king which reads as follows : " I filled with the corpses of my enemies the ravines and raised them to the summit of the mountains; I chopped off their heads and crowned with them the walls of their cities; I brought away booty, slaves and treasure immeasurable ". The inscription was obviously inspired by poetic fancy and merely gave expression to what all warlike rulers from time immemorial were either doing or wanted to do, and has nothing very particularly Assyrian about it. Anyway, as we shall see presently the Assyrians were overcome by a people

living very near their capital within their empire, and if the Assyrians were so bloodthirsty and cruel as is made out, it is difficult to see how they suffered their enemies to exist so close to them.

The Assyrians were great builders and sculptors. They learnt the art of building in bricks from the Amorities and improved upon it by building in stone, and raised great temples to their god Ashur. Those massive winged bulls, and human heads with cascade like beards the pictures of which are now familiar to students of ancient history were all the work of Assyrian sculptors.

In 612 B. C. Assyria fell and its capital Nineveh was taken by a coalition of two peoples, the Chaldeans and the Medes. The Medes who were Aryan settlers in the north of Assyria seem to have gone back to their country after the fall of Nineveh taking with them what spoils of war they could get. The Chaldeans were the lineal descendants of the Babylonians whom Assyrians had conquered, and they became successors to the Mesopotamian civilisation of Hamurabi. They rebuilt Babylon and under Nebuchadnezzar, this city again became the wonder of the ancient world and was particularly noted for its commerce, patronage of arts and learning, and its far famed hanging gardens. The Chaldeans were famous astronomers, and even today the Babylonian tables of star movements are studied by our astronomers. Nebuchadnezzar conquered all lands formerly held by the Assyrians except Egypt, and in the *Old Testament*, he is said to have destroyed the temple of Jerusalem and carried off into captivity the major part of the Jewish population to Babylon. It would appear that the first time the Jews revolted he defeated and pardoned them, but they again rebelled on which the emperor brought them nearer home in order to keep them out of mischief.

But the glory of resurrected Babylon was short lived; for soon after Nebuchadnezzar's death a hitherto little

known people descended from the East into Babylon and the city fell to them in the year 539 B.C. These people were the Persians, who, like the Medes; were also Aryans who had settled down east of the Chaldean empire.

The outburst of Aryan tribes from the Caspian-Aral region into the settled civilisations of south-west Asia and Europe was an important event in world history. We find that these Aryan tribes started their migrations sometime in the middle of the second millenium B. C. What drove them on so large a scale from their original homeland is not known; perhaps the Aryan tribes might have grown too unwieldy to live together or, more probably, some powerful nomad movement from the east or north dislodged the Aryans from their homeland and sent them seeking new homes elsewhere.

The Assyrian empire checked their southward advance, and some of the tribes settled down north and east of Assyria, while others streamed forth into India through the Khyber and overran the Panjab. An important branch of Aryans went westward and fanned out south into the Aegean area and north into northern Europe. The Persians, as we shall see presently, conquering the Babylonian empire, started expanding its frontiers, and in course of time pressed against their brethern who had settled down in the Aegean region; these people, known in history as the Greeks, resented the encroachment and a war started between these two Aryan peoples which had far reaching effect on world cultures in general and on India in particular.

#### ANCIENT SEA ROVERS

As on land, there were, from very early times, great wanderers on the sea. Navigation is, in fact, as old as man and even when he had no instruments to cut timber, primitive man must have rolled into the river or lake some sizable log and, sitting astride it, punted or,



where water was deep, paddled the log with a flat stick. A definite improvement was made when two logs were tied together to prevent rolling and the punter stood comfortably on the raft which could accommodate a number of persons and their belongings.

When instruments improved, logs were hollowed and ends chopped to taper in order to cut into the waters the better, and these were the first boats. It would be interesting to note that though some ten thousand years have now elapsed since the first little boat was hollowed out of a sizable tree trunk, the pattern has remained essentially the same and our ocean-going liner, though much bigger in size, is the same in shape. The primitive little boats were used for crossing rivers and lakes and for fishing in creeks and near shore waters of the sea. Such boats are even now extensively used in many parts of the world, and in the great ports of Asia these little boats can be seen plying alongside liners, vigorously paddled by sturdy boatmen.

A definite advance in boat building took place when waterproof material that could be held together by means of ropes and ribs into boat shape was used and the seams and joints caulked. Boats of reeds covered with skin were in use in ancient Egypt and Sumeria and in Mohanjodaro. As navigation of the seas (in the initial stages mainly coastal) developed, and with it trade and the need for carrying merchants and their cargo, the well rigged boat with masts and sails began to appear among peoples used to boat building and sea-going.

One of the earliest seafaring people in the world of whom we have a good account were ancient Cretans, whose civilisation was coeval with the Egyptian but forgotten for ages and brought to light only a few decades ago by the industry of the archaeologist. These Cretans were a highly civilised seafaring people with their main settlements in Crete and along the shore of the Aegean

sea and in Asia Minor. Their kings were known as Minos as the Egyptian king was called Pharaoh. Minos lived in a beautiful palace in Crete, and his naval strength was such that he did not care to build walls round the palace and relied on his navy for defence. The Cretans were masters of the Aegean Sea and traded with Egypt and the towns and cities on the eastern Mediterranean sea board. They were a highly civilised people with a well developed art and architecture, and were great lovers of sports and games of which the most spectacular was bull-fighting. Their writing has not been deciphered so far. The Greeks, it would appear, learnt the elements of civilisation from the Minoans whom they conquered and destroyed. The Minoans are also credited with having made the first aeroplane. A Minoan engineer named Daedalus, it would appear, built and piloted this plane which in its maiden flight crashed into the sea; after this no Minoan cared to repeat the perilous experiment.

The origin of these Minoans is obscure. They were probably of the same stock as the Egyptians, and as the latter moved eastward before advancing desert, the Minoans perhaps moved northward and took to sea-faring.

The next important people in known history to take to seafaring and considerably develop navigation were the Phoenicians, a branch of the same Semites who had conquered the Sumerians and built up the great empires of which we have already spoken. They settled on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean and took to the sea as some of their brethren took to empire building; they had the blood of the nomad in them, little attachment to any particular country and were quite at home wherever they went as long as the sea was near. They had no political ambitions and were quite content with trade. They do not seem to have come into active conflict with the Minoans; they had their main settlements on the coastal

regions of Syria, but had colonies all along the northern coast of Africa and the southern coast of Europe extending right up to Iberia which was one of the ancient strongholds of the Phoenicians. They were the undoubted masters of the Mediterranean Sea in the first millenium B. C. and their ships often ventured out of the Strait of Gibraltar and traded with the then barbarous peoples of Britain and northern Europe.

A peculiarity of the Phoenician religion was the sacrifice of the first born child at the altar of their gods. This practice had continued almost to the Christian era and during the latter part of their history we hear of sacrifice by proxy ie: the wealthier people paying poor people to substitute the children of the latter for their own. In spite of their noxious religion, the Phoenicians, like all trading nations, were carriers of civilisation between different parts of the world. They transmitted religious beliefs, customs and manners, arts and sciences from one people to another and generally increased people's knowledge of one another and of different countries and their products. In the *Old Testament* these Phoenicians are recorded to have brought for the Jewish king Solomon of Jerusalem, ivory, apes and peacocks from India, as well as timber and rare commodities from distant lands.

One of the most important contributions of the Phoenicians to world civilisation was the phonetic script. The hieroglyphics and cuneiform writing, as we have seen, were in picture script. This is a comparatively easy form of writing; for art has always preceded writing, and from drawing to picture writing is a natural step. But the ingenious method of catching fleeting speech and reducing it to visible form (which is what is meant by the phrase phonetic writing) marks a radical advance in writing methods. The Phoenicians were not perhaps the originators, but only transmitters of the script which was in use among some people with whom they traded. Their

name, however, is generally connected with this new script; anyway it is clear that all the phonetic scripts of the present have a common origin, for all start with the vowel 'a' whether Greek, Arabic, Latin, Sanskrit, Tamil or their cognates.

As the Minoans and Phoenicians were roving the Mediterranean, there were great rovers in the Indian and Pacific oceans but these have left us no records and monuments. Or it may be the monuments they had left have not yet been discovered by us. For archaeology in Asia is still in its infancy while that in Europe is only slightly better advanced.

From time immemorial there have been seamen and boats on the eastern and southern seaboard of Asia, and settlements of seafaring peoples in the islands of the Indian ocean and the Pacific. Most of these primitive seafarers were fishers who lived in their boats and moved from coast to coast and island to island. During the rainy season, when fishing was difficult and sailing dangerous, they settled down in congenial regions and probably cultivated seasonal crops. When crops were poor and fishing yielded little, these sea rovers raided settlements near the coast. The uncertainties of the results of raiding probably made the more far-sighted of the pirates realise the advantages of trade, as all people valued greatly what others had and themselves did not possess. The profits of this trade made some of the sea rovers quite wealthy and powerful, and they experimented in building bigger boats able to carry more provisions and cargo, and in distant sailing. By watching the moon and stars by night, by observing the course of winds in the seas, and by rigging the boats with masts and sails these ancient sailors were able to slowly abandon the dilatory process of coastal sailing and hazard direct voyages across the seas.

We may now leave pre-history for a while and come to the fifteenth century of the Christian era when the

maritime nations of the Atlantic seaboard started their frantic search for a sea route to India due to the Turks having closed the land route. These European adventurers, in their extensive and dangerous voyages, came across many unknown lands and peoples in varying stages of civilisation. In America, which Columbus discovered, there was a fairly well developed civilisation existing without any knowledge of the old world and its teeming millions. In New Zealand and other islands of the Pacific there were inhabitants with their own peculiar social and religious notions. Of these islanders, the Polynesians were particularly noted for their sailing abilities. Without compass or charts they could sail direct to islands four or five hundred miles away, and the Tahitans were even known to have sailed to Hawaii, a thousand miles away. The drifting capacity of these Polynesians was even more astonishing. It is related in de Brosse's *Account of Pacific Voyages*, that in the year 1696 a canoe voyaging from the Carolines to the Philippines was lost in the sea in rough weather, and after drifting for seventy days arrived at the island of Samar with many men, women and children, having travelled over a thousand miles.

Anthropologists have many theories concerning the origin of these Pacific islanders and the American Indians, but none has been conclusively proved. Yet one thing is certain, that America was within sailing or drifting distance of primitive seamen of the Pacific. Between South East Asia and America, the ocean, no doubt, is very wide; but right up to Hawaii there are numerous islands within sailing range of canoes from Asia, and the mainland of America is within their drifting capacity from Hawaii. Hence it is possible that some ancient Pacific voyagers drifted or sailed to America and, cut off from the main stock, developed a civilisation of their own, unknown to the old world.

The main object of this digression is to show the reader that primitive seamen, without compass or guides,

were capable of undertaking direct sailing between distant lands, though, to be sure, many a brave canoe perished in such hazardous voyages. Anyway, the activity of ancient seafarers of the Indian and Pacific Oceans was widespread, and seems to have extended from the Philippines all along the coast of Asia to South India and even to Madagascar. Archaeologists have discovered the same type of quadrangular adzes and other primitive instruments of the stone age in the dolmen tombs of South India and the Philippines, and anthropologists strange affinities in the languages and customs of Polynesians, races of South East Asia and the Nagas of Assam border. It is even argued that Java is the cradle of many Asian races mainly because of the discovery there of certain skeletons which are nearly human but not quite so. Further, the Maoris and their culture show some difference from Indonesian primitives, and there is a school that believes in an Austronesian culture that once extended from South India to New Zealand over a contiguous land route that was lost in the sea through some primeval cataclysm.

All this is highly conjectural and controversial; there is, however, a probability of sea-faring races having settled down in India even before the rise of Mohan-jodaro. Anyway, the peoples of South India, during the historic period, appear as fine seamen whose maritime activities extended both to the western and eastern seas. These South Indians were possibly the lineal descendents of the primitive races that roved the Indian Ocean. More than this it is hazardous to say with our present knowledge of ancient seafaring in these regions.



## CHAPTER II

### THE INDO-ARYANS

**AFTER** the discovery of Mohan-jo-daro in 1924, it has been the general practice of historians to start the history of India from 3000 B. C. and fill up the gap between the fall of Mohan-jo-daro and the rise of Indo-Aryan civilisation by imaginative writing. But our real knowledge of the Indus valley civilisation is very limited, and it remains, as far as present evidence goes, an isolated culture without any continuity.

The Indo-Aryan culture, on the other hand, has an unbroken tradition of about 3000 years. It is a living force and has passed into the common heritage of all India. The original beliefs, habits and social organisations of the Aryans who first settled down in India have, no doubt, undergone much change and modification, but have retained their distinctive characteristics and individuality. The Indo-Aryan cultural continuity can be compared to a river, small at the source, but collecting the waters of many channels, gains strength and flows into a mighty stream. This stream has been flowing for the last three thousand years, and has even put forth many mighty branches, but shows no sign yet of drying up. Such continuity on so large a scale has been rare in the world and the nearest approach to it is the Chinese civilisation. For not only the Sumerians, Egyptians, Assyrians and Chaldeans have passed into oblivion, but even the Persians and Greeks, the brethren of Indo-Aryans who established themselves in the west, lost their cultural continuity, and in religion, which has the strongest influence on culture, has accepted Semitic conceptions and are now inclined to treat their ancestors as Pagans and infidels. On the other hand, a devout Brahmin of today repeats with the same zest the religious texts his forefathers had repeated 3,000 years ago. Besides, it is

good to remember that Mohan-jo-daro is now in Pakistan and to future generations may appear as alien as Sumeria.

All told, we may take the Aryan conquest of the Panjab as the starting point in our cultural history of India. The Aryans were much less civilised than the Indus valley people; they were nomads who knew the art of agriculture, but had no cities or towns, had little knowledge of building in bricks or stone, of arts and other refinements that make life comfortable and pleasant.

The Aryan invasion of India was not an organised move under an ambitious leader, like the conquests of Alexander or Tamerlane, but a series of tribal movements that came in varying strength starting by about the middle of the second millenium B. C. and running well into the first. By about 1000 B. C. the Indo-Aryans had settled down in the Panjab and in Sind.

The lore of Indo-Aryans would indicate that they had to fight for every inch of ground with the indigenous population. Bitter and long drawn out were these wars, and the people who retarded the progress of Aryans are mentioned as ferocious, blood thirsty cannibals, sons of darkness, demons and devils, in fact by all the uncomplimentary epithets the ancients, as a rule, gave their enemies. Their enemies, when defeated, took to the woods but came at night, plundered Aryan camps, drove off their cattle and at times carried off their women. In the end, however, resistance weakened, the less virile of the indigenous kingdoms submitted to the Aryans while the more sturdy peoples left their original homes and settled down in regions inaccessible to the invaders. The Aryans thus became the undisputed masters of the Panjab and settled down here, and gave up all ideas of returning to their northern homes; the Aryans, in short, became Indians.



The Indo-Aryans had no ideas of building up empires like the great Semites of the Mesopotamian region. Each clan lived under its own chieftain, but in times of trouble or common danger, the tribes formed into a confederacy under a chosen leader; the confederacy was dissolved after the danger was past and each clan reverted to its ancient ways.

The Aryans were not, however, left in peace in the Panjab. This region has been, from time immemorial, the cockpit of India, and the first to bear the impact of the periodical invasions of India from the north-west. The Aryans must have found the place not very congenial for settling down or pursuing peaceful occupations, but were forced by pressure from wild hordes from the north and north-west to move down into the Gangetic plain. Thus the Indo-Aryans advanced eastward driving hostile peoples to the south beyond the Vindhya, subjugating the docile and allowing the friendly to retain their independence.

Practically all the original Aryan settlers of the Panjab were thus driven down the Gangetic plain, and it is interesting to note that in Indo-Aryan literature it is the Ganges that rose to be the sacred stream of the Hindus and not the Indus; further in the *Mahabharata*, that repository of Indo-Aryan tradition, the people of the Panjab and north-west are generally mentioned as of mixed breed, practising strange orgies, their women particularly aggressive and licentious. All this would indicate that they were either later Aryan settlers whom the earlier ones considered low, or races of alien extraction who were reluctantly admitted into the Aryan fold because of their superior military strength.

#### EARLY INDO-ARYAN RELIGION

The Aryans brought with them to India their tribal gods. The pre-occupations connected with a wandering

life prevented them from developing any elaborate religion or ritual, and unlike the Egyptians and Mesopotamian peoples, they had no great temples and images. The Aryans seem to have been happily free from those fertility cults and attendant orgies which were characteristic of most of the ancient religions. Theirs were bright deities: Indra, god of the firmament, Varuna, the all-seeing, Maruts the deities of wind and storm, Pushan the god of wayfarers and the like. The early Vedic pantheon, it would appear, consisted of 33 gods. There were a few goddesses and these were more often admired for their charm and accomplishments than worshipped. Ushas, for instance, the goddess of dawn, was a beautiful lady, elusive and charming, who woke up the sleeping to the accompaniment of the music of early birds, and sent out the Aryans in their various daily occupations.

Indra, the chief deity of early Vedic Aryans was essentially a god of war; he helped his people in their wars with their enemies, and was particularly effective with his unerring weapon, the thunderbolt. He was also the god of rain. There were no permanent temples built in his honour as this would have considerably handicapped the mobility needed for the life of the nomad. The usual mode of worship was by constructing a temporary altar, as the occasion rose, where the tribal chief slaughtered animals as sacrifice, poured out, to the accompaniment of chanting of hymns in praise of the deity, libations of Soma, an intoxicating beverage made out of a plant of that name. After a successful war, the function was necessarily on a much larger scale. Huge halls of wood and thatch were constructed and many altars built where several chiefs offered sacrifices simultaneously; the congregation was of a mixed type and after the holy rites there was a sumptuous feast and heavy drinking of Soma. The bards of each tribe regaled the audience with tales of the exploits of the ancient heroes and of gods. The merry sang and danced and the

excitable, under the influence of Soma, possibly indulged in free fights and had to be removed from the hall by sober Aryans.

There is no trace in early Indo-Aryan literature of the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration which is at present the most distinctive feature of Indo-Aryan religions. Good Aryans who led successful campaigns against their enemies or advanced the cause of the tribes in any way, went, on death to the regions of celestials, and in their long journeys to these far off regions they were guided by Pushan, the god of wayfarers. The Paradise or heaven to which the good went was a region of sensuous pleasures where there were lovely plants and gardens and rivers of Soma. Drinking Soma with the gods was one of the major delights of the Paradise and those who partook of it with the celestials became immortals. Yama, it would appear, was the presiding genius of heaven, and he, along with his wife Yami, were believed to be the first humans who died and were translated to the realms of the immortals.

What the fate of the wicked was, is not clear from early literature. While some hymns of the *Rig Veda* would indicate that they suffered annihilation on death, others have vague references to regions of darkness from which the wicked have no escape. The hells of later texts with rivers of molten metal, fearsome birds and reptiles, and torture by demoniac creatures have not been described in early Vedic texts, though references to certain nether regions of Nirriti, a power of darkness, and of mysterious abysses inhabited by witches and female goblins can be found in later Vedic literature.

Early cosmic conception too was simple. The earth and the sky constituted the universe 'as two bowls turned towards each other.' As knowledge advanced, a further division became necessary; for it was noticed that birds could not fly beyond a certain height, not at any rate to

the sun, moon and the stars. Hence the region above the earth was divided into the sky and the heavens, and 'the vault of the sky' formed the heavenly line of demarcation. The heavens are mentioned in early Vedic literature as a region to which no bird can fly, and were generally considered the abode of deities and deified mortals. The region of darkness which was later to develop into hells was situated below the earth.

#### ARYAN SOCIETY

War and Soma drinking were not the only occupations of the Indo-Aryans. They could use the hoe with equal skill as the sword. Agriculture was, in fact, their main occupation and both men and women laboured in the field; farming was not considered a mean calling, but rather as an ancient and noble occupation. In the ploughing season, the chieftain probably initiated the ploughing rite and invoked the gods to send seasonal rain; the demon of drought was the dreaded enemy of early Indo-Aryans, and god Indra is often described as piercing the demon with his thunderbolt. A good many of the Vedic hymns were composed and recited in praise of crop and rain, of milch cows and plentiful harvests and are illustrative of an idyllic society working in the fields, ploughing and tending cattle in the wide pasture lands. But cattle lifters were always on the prowl, and these sons of the night at times drove away the cattle of the Aryans and these gave them hot chase.

Apart from feasts and festivities, the Aryans had games and tournaments, and horse and chariot races were the most important of their sports. They loved gambling too, and some of the early Vedic hymns were composed in order to secure luck in gambling. The Aryans throughout their history were particularly addicted to gambling and there are stories in Indian literature of kings who gambled away, not only their kingdoms, but even their wives.

While the Indo-Aryans lived their semi-nomad life in the Panjab and the north-west, society generally conformed to ancient patterns, but as they pushed into the Gangetic plain, subduing indigenous peoples and founding kingdoms and building cities, things began to change.

The attitude of Indo-Aryans towards the conquered peoples was marked by two main characteristics: A sense of racial superiority and an accommodating spirit in religious beliefs. From this attitude was developed that unique socio-religious system known as caste, noted for its social rigidity and extreme religious tolerance. As the Aryans settled down in the Gangetic plain with numerous peoples under them, the conquered and the conquerors gradually forgot their old animosity and bitterness and started living in amity and good will. On the question of their racial superiority, however, the Aryans were not prepared to compromise, but in religious matters, they were not only prepared to tolerate but even to give the gods of the conquered niches in their own pantheon.

Compared with the indigenous population who were brownish or dark, the Aryans had a lighter complexion. Now women have always had a greater fascination for men other than those of their own race, and non-Aryan men too thought Aryan women better company for them. The Aryan considered indigenous women better looking than his own, and the right thing under these conditions would have been to permit intermarriages; but the Aryans, who were the conquerors, decided that none of their women should marry outside her race, while an Aryan man, in addition to his Aryan wife was permitted to marry women of indigenous races who were not, however, given the same status as the Aryan ladies. The browns and blacks naturally objected to this palpable injustice, and unable to get legal redress, often resorted to abduction and runaway marriages. Such racial complications based on pigmentations of skin arise even now

in the modern world, and humanity has changed very little in this respect; for in the United States of America, one of the most cosmopolitan and democratic countries in the world, we find the whites objecting to Negroes marrying their women, and widespread riots occur at times in their attempts to segregate the Negroes.

The caste system of the Indo-Aryans was based on this notion of the superiority of whites. The system is known in Sanskrit as Varna-Asrama-Dharma or social order based on colour. The conquered peoples who accepted the superiority of the Aryans and lived under them were called Sudras, and these did the menial work for their masters. These Sudras were allowed to worship their own ancient gods in their own shrines, and a condescending Aryan even frequented a Sudra shrine, but the Sudra was not admitted into the company of Aryans; nor was he allowed to interdine or intermarry with them.

In the meantime the Aryan society itself was undergoing considerable change. In the olden days, the tribal chief was king and priest, but in their continued wars with their enemies, the Indo-Aryans realised the need for better technique and organisation in war, and the warrior found little time for sacrifices and ritual which were now becoming more frequent and elaborate. Hence the functions of priest and warrior were separated, and a class of people specially proficient in the ancient lore and traditional methods of worship were set apart for sacrifices and invoking the gods for victory in war, and these men came to be known as Brahmins and the warriors as Kshatriyas. Neither the Brahmin nor the Kshatriya had time or inclination for agriculture, especially during periods of long drawn out campaigns against elusive enemies, and the rest of the Aryan population pursued the ancient occupation of agriculture, cattle breeding and the now fast developing occupation of trade. And these traders, farmers and cattle breeders were known as

Vaisyas. Thus the origin of caste, the basis of Indo-Aryan social system which has survived to our own day.

When the system was first introduced, no caste among the Aryans was probably considered superior and the three divisions were based on the need for better communal efficiency. But gradually the warrior and priest began to dominate society and they thought themselves superior to the Vaisyas. Between the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, the latter was at first considered superior, and we see traces of this notion prevailing in the Buddha's time among the clans of East India. But later when belief in the power of the Brahmins to control spirits and gods by rituals and spells gained popularity, Brahmins came to be looked upon as the highest among castes, a position they have retained to the present day.

The caste system worked well enough when the Aryans had only the indigenous population to deal with whom they had subdued. But they were not allowed to rule in peace for long either in the Panjab or in the Gangetic plain as fresh outbursts of tribes, often non-Aryan, from the north-west conquered many Aryan settlements and kingdoms. These new comers had no well-developed religion or social organisation but they had come with the intention of settling down in the country and ruling it, and these people offered many problems for the Indo-Aryans. They could not be treated as servile classes, as they could always show by their skill in arms that they were superior. And it would appear that they were fitted into the Indo-Aryan social pattern as Kshatriyas particularly because of their proved ability as fighters: and these neo-Kshatriyas, in their turn, generally accepted the Brahmins as their priests as they had by now gained fame and popularity as great wizards and ritualists. Thus, not all the members of the upper castes are essentially Aryans by race, though they have accepted Aryan social and religious theories and practices. This process of

assimilation of alien elements into Hindu castes went on right up to the Muslim period and the origin of many of the sub castes into which each main caste is divided can be traced to this. Anyway, the people who now claim to be Aryans, even the Brhamins who are particularly proud of their purity of caste, are of mixed blood, and among them too can be found dark skinned men of Dravidian extraction, Mongloids, and others, in fact, practically all the racial types of India.

#### WOMEN MARRIAGE AND MORALS

The Aryans who settled down in India were a patriarchal and not matriarchal people. The lay reader is not likely to be familiar with the full implications of these terms and some elucidation is necessary.

Sociologists believe that primitive society, the world over, was once matriarchal, that is, tracing descent through mothers and the mother generally exerting greater authority in the family and over the children than the father, and women as a rule dominating the social life of the tribe. The main reason for this belief in universal primitive matriarchy is the fact of early man's ignorance of paternity: that is, there was a time in human development when people did not know that sex activities were responsible for women bearing children. Girls when they came of age were thought to bear children as trees bear fruit in their time. Sex activities there were, to be sure, and even family life, as a man usually attached himself to a woman he loved and lived with her and her children. This family was more like the animal family we see today, in which a pair live with their young ones, not knowing that their sex activities are responsible for the birth of the little ones. There are primitive societies of this type existent in certain remote regions of the earth even today, and the curious will find much useful information on the subject in Malinowski's books on Trobriand Islanders.



And then a great primitive biologist discovered the true cause of pregnancy in women. With this momentous discovery, men started taking a lively interest in children; it flattered them to think that women were incapable of bearing children without them, and an intimacy, hitherto unknown, began to develop between a man and his mate's children. In course of time he began to insist that the children of his mate whom he was expected to support, should be his own and not of any one else, and that they must be called after him and not after their mother. Much of our existing ideas of morality, chastity, adultery etc. are derived out of this paternal insistence.

Even after the discovery of paternity, all societies did not turn patrilineal immediately, but some developed on the old matriarchal lines. The ancient Egyptians were a notable example of this, and among them queens were held in greater honour than kings; women had greater social freedom and enjoyed better property rights than men. Nor is the institution completely extinct. In many parts of the modern world there are island communities who follow the ancient matrilineal traditions and in India the Khasis of Assam and the Nairs of Kerala are even now matriarchs.

Anyway, the Aryans when they came to India brought with them patriarchal institutions. The father was the head of the family. Matriarchal traditions seem to have been prevalent in some clans, and a curious story of the Brahmin Satyakama Jabala is told in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. It would appear the young Satyakama was sent to a school and the teacher before admission wished to know of what Gotra or clan he was by birth. Satyakama could not furnish this information and was obliged to go back to his mother for enlightenment. And strangely enough, Jabala, his mother, was no better informed than her son. "I know not child", said she, "of what Gotra you are. During my youth when I got thee, I was engaged

in attending on many guests who frequented the house of my husband, and I had no opportunity of ascertaining the matter. Hence I know not of what Gotra you are. Jabala is my name, and Satyakama thine. Say therefore of thyself, Satyakama son of Jabala ”.

This practice of the lady of the house “ attending on ” honoured guests was probably a survival from matriarchal times; this rule of hospitality, it is related, was abolished by a sage named Swetaketu who disapproved of it. Traces of similar practices, of fraternal polyandry and allied institutions were prevalent among certain clans, but generally speaking patriarchal institutions had been well established among the Aryans when they settled down in the Panjab. Though polygyny was practised by kings and sages of vast learning the common folk were monogamous. Child marriage that became the bane of Hindu society later, was not prevalent in early times. The Vedic bride, as many hymns indicate, was a grown up young lady and consummation usually took place a few days after the performance of the marriage ceremony. Widow burying was unknown; burial was the prevailing practice of disposing of the dead, and the widow who mourned at the grave of her husband was led home by the brother of the deceased who subsequently married her; such marriage was a well established custom among many ancient peoples, including the Jews, and was inspired by the need for many sons to work for the family and the tribe who could ill afford to let the fertility of women go waste.

Vedic marriage was sacramental and indissoluble, but marriage by contract was recognized though not widely practised. The story of Pururavas, an honoured ancestor of Indo-Aryans who married the dancer Urvashi is a notable example of marriage by contract. Pururavas married Urvashi on a stipulated condition, and in the event of his breaking it she was free to leave him. The king, through a stratagem planned by the lovers of Urvashi, broke the contract, on which she left him.

When the caste system developed and with it the lofty pretensions of the higher castes, an inordinate passion for preserving the purity of caste by ensuring the loyalty of women seized the Indo-Aryans. Though a man could marry below his caste if the girl was desirable, a woman was never permitted to do this. Pollution of caste was believed to be caused by the vagaries of women and a tendency was evident in later Vedic period to tighten the ties of matrimony as far as women were concerned. With this rigidity started the levity of women, and we read in later Vedic literature tales of illegitimate conceptions, exposure of babies that could not be accounted for, and of fervent prayers by sturdy Aryans to give them sons and daughters to their enemies.

#### RISE OF BRAHMINISM

With the development of the caste system, the Brahmins were generally freed from the need for working for a living and were generously paid by pious Aryans for communal as well as for individual services. This freedom from labour gave the Brahmins time and opportunities to study, in detail, the lore of the Indo-Aryans, memorise and transmit it to their successors. Ritual developed; gods were to be worshipped and sacrifices offered to them not in the haphazard manner that was done hitherto, but by constructing the correct type of altars favoured of the gods (which the ritualist alone knew) by repeating proper hymns at the appropriate time, and killing sacrificial victims in a particular way. The nature and functions of gods and goddesses were also defined, and it became important that proper gods should be invoked for particular purposes. In short, the Brahmins developed an elaborate system of worshipping and invoking gods which they alone claimed to know; any

one not thoroughly conversant with the exact procedure of the ritual was feared to derange the rite and anger the gods, as a god not properly addressed or invoked for purposes to which he was unsuited lost his temper.

The literature of the Vedas \* was thus classified and arranged for ritualistic purposes, mainly for the performance of animal sacrifices. The number and tempo of sacrifices had also risen. The Aryans had passed the nomadic stage and had built sizable kingdoms with regular capitals and boundaries, and the chieftains had become wealthy and powerful kings. To such a people the old methods of occasional sacrifices appeared niggardly and mean; regular sacrificial halls were now built on a permanent basis, and blood began to flow generously at the altars. These halls and altars, it would appear, were wooden structures, for the Indo-Aryans had not as yet copied the architecture of the conquered who built in bricks.

This elaboration of sacrificial religion gave rise to a body of literature known as Brahmanas or ritualistic precepts which laid down, among other things, the correct rules for performing sacrifices. The routine daily sacrifices were not very expensive but involved only the slaughter of a few animals, but on special occasions, especially after the conquest and plunder of a neighbouring kingdom, kings performed grand sacrifices, thousands of animals were slaughtered, hundreds of learned Brahmins assisted the main priests and the whole thing lasted several weeks at the end of which handsome gifts were given to the Brahmins by the king.

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For detailed description of Indian literature please see chapter XII.

Usually, the animals slaughtered were sheep, goats and oxen. A passage in the *Aitareya Brahmana*, however, indicates that occasionally a human being was sacrificed. The most celebrated of all sacrifices was the Asvamedha, or horse-sacrifice performed by a powerful Aryan king after the conquest of several kingdoms. The Asvamedha signified universal dominion; the sacrificial horse was let loose to wander at will in the neighbouring kingdoms and an army followed the horse. Any one who challenged the supremacy of the king was free to obstruct the passage of the horse and he had then to be overcome. As a rule most of the kings allowed the passage of the horse through their kingdoms out of politeness or friendliness and this was accepted as homage and no further token of vassalage was considered necessary.

There were, however, some virile minds among the Brahmins who thought that sacrifices to the gods were not all that mattered in this world and the next. They were not satisfied with the traditional explanations about life and death. In spite of the endless rounds of sacrifices, nothing seemed to last in the world. Life sprang up only to perish in the dust. The learned died raving like the fool, and the king like a beggar. A sense of weariness with this unending flux, seen everywhere in the world, seized some of the contemplative minds among the Brahmins, and they started an enquiry into the meaning of life, to see if there was something beyond all this flux, something that was permanent, constant and never-changing, something men could rely upon.

The result of this passionate enquiry into reality has come down to us in the body of literature known as *nishads*, the expression, of the awakened mind, of a

sense of the invisible, mystic world. The *Upanishads* form the mainspring of all philosophical thought of the Hindus. The teaching of the *Upanishads*, put in a nutshell, is that there is an immutable, all pervading reality known as Atman or Brahm, the mainstay of the phenomenal world of change, and the object of life is to realise in oneself, through knowledge, this fundamental identity of the individual with the universal soul or Atman.

The doctrine taught in the *Upanishads* was essentially esoteric or secret; it was not to be divulged to all and sundry, but only to Brahmins with the necessary qualifications, who could understand and live up to it. For the generality of men engaged in their various occupations, the best form of religion was to do their traditional caste duties faithfully and call in Brahmins when they stood in need of the aid of gods.

A radical departure from traditions, as far as dogma was concerned, was the grafting in the Upanishad times, of a belief in transmigration of souls into the Vedic religion. How this belief originated is not clear. Perhaps some Indo-Aryan sage, an inventive genius, revealed it; or more probably it was prevalent in some tribes the Indo-Aryans were friendly with and was thought worthy of assimilation. Whatever the origin, once it was accepted by Indo-Aryans, the idea gained immense popularity and in course of time became the most distinctive dogma of the three Indian religions, Brahminism, Buddhism and Jainism.

When the doctrine of transmigration found acceptance, the old belief in immortality was not entirely given up. What happened was a compromise; after the soul had enjoyed the rewards of its actions in Paradise or suffered punishments in hells, which had by now become a

recognised feature of Brahminism, it started its journey of transmigration into human or animal kingdoms, into celestial planes or regions of demons. \* Thus heaven and hell were given up as permanent abodes of the dead, but became as transitory as our own world, to disappear in time with the dissolution of the universe.

It is doubtful if the Aryans, when they came to India, knew the art of writing. They learned the alphabet probably from the peoples they conquered, or traders might have introduced it among them. Whatever its origin, the earliest known Indo-Aryan script, known as Brahmi, from which later scripts of India developed, was phonetic, the type the Phoenicians used, and not the pictorial type of hieroglyphics, cuneiform or Chinese.

Their sacred literature, not at any rate the more important of the hymns, was not reduced to writing immediately the alphabet was introduced among the Indo-Aryans. These hymns were transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation and were feared to lose their sanctity if reduced to writing. Even the Buddhists who were generally above such notions, kept up the convention, and their scriptures were not reduced to writing for about five centuries after the death of the Buddha, the monks memorising the texts and transmitting them orally to their disciples.

The belief in transmigration is mainly responsible for the religious tolerance shown by the followers of Indo-Aryan religions, and their patience with men of slow understanding. The Semites : ie : the Jews, Christians and Muslims, generally believe that there is but one human life

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\* Please see chapters VII and XI for Indian religious cosmology.

to decide the fate of eternity for a man, and to them it is all important that the unbeliever should be converted immediately lest he be eternally damned. The Hindu or Buddhist is in no such hurry. A man who cannot mend his ways now may do better in the next birth or possibly in one of the thousands of rebirths that await him, and there is no point in trying to convert him by terror, violence or even aggressive persuasion. Besides all men are not equal in understanding; souls are in various stages of development in accordance with deeds done in their past lives, and the sage and the fool move almost in different planes. Hence the need for infinite patience with what we call human nature.





## CHAPTER III

### THE BUDDHA AND BUDDHISM

THE Buddha may be considered the first great man in world history to conceive the fundamental unity of all life, and to give effective expression to a feeling that humanity has a common bond and a common end. For us, used to centuries of Buddhist, Christian and Islamic teachings, and the messages of great saints and humanitarians, the doctrine of unity and brotherhood of man may now sound stale. But 2,500 years ago, the idea was revolutionary in the extreme, and no teacher, even if he had held these views, had dared to preach it in public. To appreciate the magnitude and magnanimity of the conception of the Buddha, it is necessary for us to have some idea of the religious background of the time of the Buddha's life.

Brahminism, as we have seen, had developed into an elaborate ritual, and only learned Brahmins were competent to perform sacrifices, and even in domestic worship their services became indispensable. Sanskrit was the religious language of the Brahmins and only these and, in some cases, Kshatriyas had access to ritualistic literature. Popular religion had lost all spontaneity, and religion, as a rule was considered the monopoly of the Brahmins in the India of the Buddha's time.

Elsewhere things were little different. Wherever there were well developed priestly classes as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, common people had no access to sacred literature. What little religious wisdom trickled down to the lower orders was strictly confined to their own nationals. Each race and people considered their own gods as their special protectors, as hostile to their

enemies as they themselves were. Rituals connected with propitiating and invoking these gods were jealously guarded secrets, as jealously guarded, in fact, as secret weapons. Further, every race used such uncomplimentary epithets as barbarians, Mlechchas etc. to denote not only enemies but all foreigners. To divulge to such people the sacred wisdom of a race was considered the highest sacrilege, the throwing of pearls before swine, so to say.

In this religious atmosphere of the ancient world, the Buddha declared that no race or class had a monopoly of religion, the Brahmin was spiritually no better than the Sudra, that caste was a mere social convenience, that Sanskrit had no greater sanctity than popular dialects, that the *Vedas* were not infallible, and not only Brhamins but all the peoples of the world had equal chances of salvation.

Above all, the Buddha's sensitive nature revolted at the cruelty his countrymen were perpetrating in the name of the gods; for while he held that the human birth was the noblest, he also felt a kinship with all life, and thought the causing of avoidable pain was sin. Though he did not completely stop killing for meat, which would have caused widespread hardship in the country as at that time the population was non-vegetarian, he advised his followers to reduce it to a minimum. But he condemned outright the prevailing religious practice of killing for the pleasure of the gods and turned away in disgust from sacrificial Brahminism. He declared that the thirst for blood was not divine but demoniac, and that the highest life was one led with the avowed object of causing the least injury to living beings.

The Buddha's teachings were, more than anything else, responsible for the spread of Indian culture abroad,

and at present he has probably greater following than any other teacher in history. He is the best known Indian in the world, and his fame is more than two millenia old. Of this extra-ordinary man, this founder of the First Empire of Belief, we have a wealth of information. But a halo of legendary reverence shrouds his figure and it is difficult to disentangle the personality of the Buddha from the maze of myths and legends that has grown about him in the course of centuries. Anyway, a sketch of the life of the Buddha is indispensable to a work on the cultural empire of India, and a few salient features that bear the genuine stamp of his personality are given below.

#### LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Siddhartha (this was the personal name of the Buddha) was born in the little kingdom of Kapilavastu, on the borders of the present Nepal. His father Suddhodhana was the chieftain of the Kshatriya clan of Sakyas who had settled down in Kapilavasthu, and his mother's name was Mahamaya. The date of his birth is given as 566 B. C. according to one account and 624 B. C. according to another. Tragedy marked the arrival of the Buddha into the world, for seven days after his birth Mahamaya died and the babe was brought up by Prajapati, Mahamaya's sister, who was also a wife of Suddhodhana.

India at the time of the Buddha's birth had no great empires. Some sixteen kingdoms were known as Mahajanapadas or Great States of which Magadha, corresponding to modern Bihar, was one, ruled by a king named Bimbisara. North and east of Magadha, the Aryan settlers followed their ancient clan rule, and some eight of these clans were the more important in these regions at the Buddha's time, and the Sakyas were one of these.

The method of choosing a ruler was by election in certain clans, and by heredity in others. The form of government was oligarchical but even common members of the clan had some say in the matter of election and confirmation of rulers, and this was generally expressed through assemblies of elders of the clan. The oldest name for king in Buddhist literature is Mahasammata, (popularly elected) and in return for his services in the matter of maintaining law and order among the people, he received a seventh of the produce of the land. This ancient Buddhist notion of kingship is reflected in the rebuke administered to a king by the Patriarch Aryadeva: "Wherefrom thy superciliousness, O King! Thou art but the servant of thy people who pay thee for thy services!" The later Indo-Aryan ideals of the divine origin and rights of kings were unknown in the Buddha's time among the clans of East India, and Sudhodhana, though a powerful chieftain, was neither a despot nor an autocrat.

It would appear that in East India at the time, the Kshatriyas were considered the highest caste and not the Brhamins. The power of the Brhamins, however, was well established in the Gangetic plain, and the Kshatriyas of the east were probably jealous of their growing importance. This is one of the reasons why the teachings of the Buddha and his contemporary Mahavira found particular favour among the Kshatriyas; for both these teachers, Kshatriyas themselves, rejected the infallibility of the Vedas and challenged the religious monopoly enjoyed by the Brahmins.

Sudhodhana, as was but natural to a Kshatriya chieftain, wanted to bring up Siddhartha in the martial traditions of his clan, and had dreams of his son distinguishing himself in the battlefield, extending the frontiers of his kingdom

and raising the power and prestige of his clan. But Siddhartha had other ideas of greatness. As a boy he was sensitive and quick to revolt at injury: he was pained to see the struggling, strife, accidents, suffering, decay and death that seemed inseparable from life.

A story typical of the boy's sensitiveness to injury and suffering is narrated in Buddhist literature. One evening Siddhartha was walking alone in his father's pleasure; the splendour of the setting sun, the cool breeze, the fragrance of flowers, the gurgling of the streams in the pleasure, the pools of lotuses, and, in the distance, the peasants returning home after the labours of the day, the cowboys driving cattle to the pen from the pastures, all this filled the boy with a sense of harmony with life around him, when suddenly from the sky fell whirling a bird shot by an unknown arrow. The bird fell in the park and Siddhartha hurried to its help. It was a swan flying to its Himalayan home; the bird had, perhaps, young ones in its nest waiting anxiously for the return of the mother swan for a feed and sleeping under the protection of her wings. This indeed was an evil deed, thought the prince, by whomsoever it might have been done.

Siddhartha removed the arrow and started dressing the wound of the bird, when his cousin Devadatta, who had shot the bird, appeared on the scene and claimed the swan. Siddhartha not only refused to surrender the bird, but scolded his cousin for wantonly shooting a creature that had done him no harm. He then took the swan to his palace and nursed it back to health. Devadatta did not leave the matter there, but took the case to the Court of Elders of the clan; Siddhartha stoutly defended his right to the bird and maintained that the swan could only belong to the person who nursed it, and not to the one

who wounded it in sport. The Elders gave their decision in Siddhartha's favour and he released the bird. This was the first quarrel in a life of rivalry between Siddhartha and Devadatta which Buddhist scriptures give in great detail; to this rivalry is hooked the eternal conflict between good and evil, and the nefarious activities of the arch villain is traced to many previous births of the two; anyway Devadatta is now expiating his sins, the scriptures tell us, in the lowest of hells called Avichi.

Suddhodhana, however, did not like the soft nature of his son. As a Kshatriya whose delight was war, young Siddhartha should have revelled in pools of blood, and not melt at the sight of a wounded bird. The Buddhist texts say that there was a prophesy that Siddhartha would become an emperor if he were prevented from seeing old men, the sick, dead bodies and Sanyasis, but would renounce the worldly life if he happened to see these; and Suddhodana, it is related, made the boy stay in specially built palaces where sorrow and pain was not even to be mentioned and life was to be a song. This is no doubt, a pious fiction; but the chieftain, knowing the sensitive nature of the boy, must have taken pains to see that he did not come across any unseemly sights that might lead to his brooding.

Anyway, it was difficult to keep the young Siddhartha to his daily round of pleasures in the palace. His enquiring mind revolted at the curtailment of liberty, and he went outside the palace and saw life around him. It pained him to see that the most vigorous of men, the most handsome, the learned and the powerful, the peasant and the prince, all had a common end; all aged, fell sick, suffered and died. This universal sway of death and suffering

appeared to Siddhartha's mind to outweigh all the pleasures of life. This thought of the domain of sorrow oppressed the prince's mind in his waking hours and in sleep and he came to the gloomy conclusion that since old age, suffering and death were the end of all, life was hardly worth living. But he wished to find out if there was a way out of this universal misery, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of all living creatures who were united in this common bondage to pain.

This desire to find out the cause of human misery and its remedy if possible became an obsession with Siddhartha, and he took little interest in the affairs of the state and in the duties of a prince. Suddhodhana and his advisers, at their wits end, thought the mind of the young man would change with marriage. Accordingly, Siddhartha's marriage was arranged with the beautiful Yasodhara, daughter of a chief named Dandapani; Siddhartha approved of the young lady and married her.

But marriage did not change the young man's mind. He was, no doubt, attached to his beautiful young wife, and had a child. But this happy marriage only brought a lull in the stormy mind of the prince. In fact, when news of the birth of his son was brought to Siddhartha, he expressed no joy but was heard to mutter to himself: "Alas! One more bond to be broken!"

Time only increased his agony, and Siddhartha could suffer it no longer. He wanted to find out, once for all, the cause of human suffering and its cure; he decided to seek it till the end of his life and was even prepared to perish in the attempt. He lost all interest in the affairs of state, even in his wife and child. He suggested to his father that it would be better for him to leave the palace

and seek solace elsewhere, but Suddhodhana would not agree to this; on the other hand, he doubled the strength of the dancing girls that attended on him and put heavy guards at the palace gates. So, one night when his wife and child were asleep, the young prince stole out of the palace and, with the aid of his trusted charioteer Channa who had harnessed his favourite steed Kantaka for the purpose, escaped into the wide, wide world.

The departure of Siddhartha from the palace is narrated with great pathos in Buddhist literature. When he stole out of his room, he is said to have returned in order to take a farewell kiss of his little son, but Yasodhara was sleeping with her arm round the child and, fearing he might wake up Yasodhara, the prince came away without being able to take a last kiss of his child.

Gautama (we may now call him by his surname or rather Gotra name) after reaching the frontiers of Kapilavasthu, dismissed his charioteer with the horse and sent him back with a message to his father and asked him to comfort the chieftain as best as he could; the decision he had taken, he emphasized, was irrevocable and Suddhodhana was requested to appoint another heir to the throne. After the departure of Channa, Gautama changed his royal garments for the simple robe of the Sanyasi, as he wished to seek the solution to the riddle of life in the traditional Indian way.

Gautama now heard that a teacher named Arara Kalama was running a school at the city of Vaisali; he proceeded to this city and joined Kalama's institution. But even after studying all that Kalama had to teach, Gautama found that he was no nearer the end he was seeking than



when he started. So he left Vaisali and travelled to Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha, where the famous sophist Rudraka was running a college of philosophy. Gautama joined Rudraka's college, and here Bimbisara, probably at the suggestion of Suddhodhana, visited him and requested him to return home to his sorrowing father and relatives. But Gautama told the well-meaning king that the decision he had taken was irrevocable, and that he was pursuing an object which, when achieved, would lead not only to his own happiness but to the happiness of all the world including his own father and king Bimbisara himself. The king was greatly impressed by the spirited reply, and asked Gautama that, if ever he came by a solution to the riddle of life, he should not forget him, and then took farewell of Gautama.

Gautama studied in Rudraka's college for some years but did not obtain here the wisdom he was seeking. So refusing an offer of Rudraka to stay with him as his chief disciple, Gautama left Rajagriha and decided to practise penance and asceticism. Five disciples of Rudraka, finding Gautama's earnestness and spirit of enquiry, joined him and these six started practising exercises in penance in a nearby village. Gautama fasted, stood in rain and sun, and generally tortured his body to elevate the soul. He was reduced to a skeleton, a fever seized him and he was on the point of death. All this, however, did not bring him anywhere near the goal he was seeking, and he felt that again he was on the wrong trail. So Gautama gave up asceticism and had a bath in a nearby river. A lady by name Sujata seeing the emaciated but luminous ascetic offered him a meal and he ate it with relish. By virtue of this gift, Sujata is revered as a great saint in Buddhism. While Gautama thus gained a disciple,

he lost his companions; for when the five found that Gautama had given up asceticism, they took him for a failure and left him.

Despondency now seized Gautama. Was there, after all, no solution to the riddle of life, no cure to human suffering? Had he left his home and people, abandoned his faithful wife and little son in pursuit of a phantom which seemed to disappear as he approached it? Had he, in fact, wasted his life? Were it not better for him to have followed the calling of his caste and ruled his kingdom well as his ancestors had done before him? Well, one thing was certain. He would not go back to Kapilavasthu frustrated. He had now spent some seven years in this search for a solution to human misery; he would pursue it to the bitter end and if he died in the attempt, no one would be the loser for it.

In the legendary life of the Buddha it is related, as we have seen, that there was a prophesy in his childhood that he would either be a universal emperor or a Buddha (World Teacher). This was no vain prophesy. For later events have shown that Gautama was a man of extraordinary energy, persistence and singleness of purpose and if he had directed these qualities for the expansion of his kingdom by organising the Aryan clans for war, he could certainly have built up a great worldly empire. In fact, lesser men than Gautama had built up far famed empires in the ancient world.

But not to digress, Gautama after he had a feed and a bath, decided to sit in meditation under a tree, and think over the whole problem. The tree is known in the Buddhist world as the Bo-tree and is held in great reverence, and a Peepal in Bodhgaya is still pointed out as the

descendant of the original tree. Gautama sat under the tree for the whole day and half the night, assailed throughout by the powers of evil; at midnight the hosts of Mara\* retired defeated and Gautama became enlightened as to the cause of human suffering and the way out. Gautama, in other words, became the Buddha or the Enlightened One.

### HIS TEACHINGS

Gautama's discovery is generally known as the four-fold verity and stated something like a syllogism thus: 1) That sorrow is inherent in life; 2) That sorrow has a cause; 3) That removal of the cause of sorrow leads to cessation of sorrow, and 4) That removal of the cause of sorrow can be effected by right living. Right living is further explained as treading the eight-fold Aryan Path of Right Belief, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Occupation, Right Effort, Right Thinking and Right Concentration.

The great thing is to grasp the fact of sorrow that is inherent in life. This, the Buddha maintained, must be obvious to all, a self-evident truth, an axiom as the logician calls it. All men and women around us are born in pain, throughout their lives they suffer pain, both physical and mental, anxieties, worries, boredom and sickness, become old and die in pain. To appreciate the universality of pain no man need be guided by revelations or sacred texts; all that is necessary is to keep one's eyes wide open. Any one who has seen a dying man can understand the tyrannous sway of pain in life. And the thinking man was asked

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\* Mara is the Hindu god of pleasure and sex love; in the Buddhist pantheon, he has, no doubt, a place but he is generally depicted as the Buddha's enemy and a power of evil.

to turn away from the thirst for life and its lures and tread the Aryan Path.

There is a certain sadness about this teaching, this overemphasis on pain which ignores the greatness of life in the aggregate, the Life Force as Shaw called it, the Elan Vital of Bergson. The Buddha too found there was a primal force that animated the universe and he called it Karma; but he found this a thing of evil that had to be got rid of, a stream of pain that had for its mainstay the desires and cravings of creatures.

It is, no doubt, possible to view life in its entirety as a splendid and colourful panorama, grand and great, and forget the sorrows of individuals in the achievements of nations and races. But the teaching of the Buddha has always had a human appeal: for when the fires of youth have died down in an individual and given place to the quiet smoke of the embers of old age, no thinking person can view his past life in retrospect, and the prospects of the future, without a touch of sadness and regret.

Anyway, in basing his teaching on the obvious prevalence of pain, the Buddha laid the foundations of sound religious ethics which obviated the need for revelations from above as a guide to right conduct. He did not ask any one to accept the authority of teachers, himself not excluded; self-reliance and conviction by one's own observation were all that the Buddha asked for in his followers. He neither affirmed nor denied the prevailing notions about gods; if there were gods, he was sure, they were themselves subject to pain and dissolution, and his teachings held good as much for gods as for men. Nor did he like to dabble in metaphysics and get involved in the polemics of his time about the origin and end of the

universe, about the nature of the liberated soul and similar abstruse points. A story typical of his attitude towards these subjects is narrated in the Buddhist scriptures. An enquirer asked him how the universe originated and how it would end. The Buddha at first tried to put him off by an evasive answer and a mild rebuke that such curiosity was unprofitable and in no way relevant to the leading of a good life. But the enquirer persisted, and said he was not prepared to accept the message of the Buddha unless the latter enlightened him on the point. The teacher now explained the attitude of the enquirer by a parable. "Suppose," said he, "a man was wounded by an arrow shot by an unknown person and lay on the roadside bleeding, and his friends seeing him wanted to remove him to a hospital, but the man were to say 'I will not permit myself to be removed from this spot till I know the name, caste and occupation of the person who shot the arrow'; surely, that man will die before he could know all this."

So avoiding metaphysics generally, the Buddha taught a way of life, which was simple and moral, as leading to the control of sensuous desires and ultimately to Nirvana or liberation from the trammels of life. The first step in this right living was the cultivation of the five virtues known as Panch Shilas: These five commandments of Buddhism are: 1) Kill not, 2) Steal not, 3) Commit not adultery, 4) Utter not falsehood, 5) Drink not spirituous liquors. Though the first commandment is not to kill, the Buddha did not ask his lay followers to resort to complete vegetarianism. This would have meant great hardship on the population who were at the time mainly meat eaters. Reasonableness was the key note of the Buddha's

teachings; he subscribed to the prevailing view regarding transmigration, and believed that souls were in different stages of development and perfection was not possible for all creatures at a given time. What was needed was a step in the right direction and this step would eventually lead to perfection, may be in thousands of births in many planes. So the Buddha did not preach strict vegetarianism but asked his followers to avoid injury to living beings as best as they could.

While the Pancha Shila was the general guide to conduct for the lay followers of the Buddha, for the monks he laid down a stricter discipline. In addition to the five commandments they had to observe the following rules: 1) Not to eat except at prescribed hours; 2) Not to use personal adornments or perfumes, 3) Not to use soft beds for sleeping or resting; 4) Not to sing, dance or witness spectacular shows; 5) Not to own precious things, nor to accept any as gift.

There was nothing revolutionary in this doctrine. The need for liberation, the feeling that life was not as good as it ought to be, was already taught by the sages who composed the Upanishads, while the doctrine of transmigration was common both to Buddhism and Brahminism. What was actually revolutionary in the teaching of the Buddha was its democratic tempo. For the Buddha rejected the infallibility of the Veda, and thus released sacred knowledge from the custody of Brahmins and made religion the common property of all; to make this effective, he rejected Sanskrit as a medium of instruction, which was understood only by the learned, and preached and taught in the dialects of the people. He rejected the religious sanctions of caste and maintained

that caste was a social convenience. His definition of the Brahmin was 'he who lived a noble life', and of Chandala (outcaste) as 'one who lived an evil life' irrespective of what the parentage of each might be.

Above everything else, the Buddha introduced into religion an element hitherto unknown to Brahminism. Usually a Brahmin teacher propounded his doctrines or philosophy to a select body of disciples, and a philosopher who taught heterodox ideas founded a sect or an order. These sectarian differences were not very clear to the public to whom all religious orders appeared alike, aloof, esoteric, and exclusive. But the Buddha and his disciples were different; they preached to the public in their own dialects, in gatherings to which traders, artisans and even outcastes were welcome. Such promiscuity appeared strange to the Brahmins and to people of their way of thinking.

Though the Buddha undermined the sanctions of caste and rejected the superiority of Brahmins, he did not preach a rising of the lower classes against the upper. Such vulgarity was altogether foreign to the temperament of the Buddha. He preached for the benefit of those who could understand him and he had no quarrel with those who could not. The Brahmin was as much to be pitied for his ignorance and vanity as the Sudra. Anger and impatience with those slow of understanding, the Buddha thought derogatory to human dignity. In all his teachings and behaviour, calmness and a refusal to lose his temper even under the gravest provocations were the distinctive traits of the Buddha, and ever since he attained enlightenment till he died he had maintained an evenness of temper unique even among world teachers. A mild expression of

sarcasm or an enigmatic smile was all that escaped him by way of disapproval of human wickedness or folly.

#### HIS MINISTRY

After his enlightenment, the Buddha taught the doctrine to two merchants named Tapussa and Ballika who happened to come by his way. These are reckoned his first lay disciples, and had the rare privilege of repeating the double formula instead of the triple. What is meant is, that at present, a person on his initiation to Buddhism has to repeat the formulae: "I take my refuge in the Buddha, I take my refuge in the Dharma (the teaching of the Buddha), I take my refuge in the Sangha (order)." But when the two merchants were converted there was no Sangha and as such they repeated the double formula consisting of the first two.

After this the Buddha wished to go and see his old teachers Kalama and Rudraka but he heard that both of them were dead. He then thought of the five ascetics with whom he had practised penance; these men were still alive and pursuing their practices in a place called Deer Park near the city of Benaras. The Buddha sought and found them. Though at first they were reluctant to listen to him, once he preached to them they were struck by the profundity of his doctrine and accepted him as their leader. These five disciples were the first members of the Sangha or Buddhist order which was later to spread to all countries from Mongolia to Java, from Persia to Japan.

The Buddha now visited many centres of learning and his following increased day by day. He also visited his native city of Kapilavasthu. Siddhodhana was still alive



and Rahula, the Buddha's son, was growing into a fine young man. Though there was some indignation in the palace when the Buddha went on his begging round in the streets of Kapilavasthu, all his relatives became his followers and Prajapati and Yasodhara founded the order of nuns. From now on kings, merchants, labourers, in fact people from all walks of life followed him and the Buddha and his disciples became familiar figures in the main cities of East India; for unlike the Brahmin teachers who seldom left their headquarters, the Buddha and his disciples moved from place to place teaching the people the noble truth he had discovered. The needs of the community were not many; they lived mainly by begging and stayed in groves under shady trees or temporary dwellings constructed for the purpose by the pious.

As the power and prestige of the Buddha and his following increased, there was considerable opposition to him from Brahmins and from followers of other persuasions. No less than three attempts on his life are recorded in Buddhist scriptures, all inspired by his cousin Devadatta who had renounced the world like prince Siddhartha and wished to become a greater leader than the Buddha. From Buddhist accounts, it would appear that Devadatta was an energetic and ambitious man, malicious and able. Against king Bimbisara, who was friendly with the Buddha, Devadatta allied himself with Ajatasatru, Bimbisara's son, and was able to do considerable harm to the Buddha and his followers. Devadatta is even said to have joined the Buddhist order and created factions and constantly set up monks to revolt against the leadership of the Buddha. But in all this he was unsuccessful and he died before the Buddha; after Devadatta's death king Ajatasatru became friendly with the Buddha.

The Buddha's ministry lasted forty years. At the time of his death, all the eight clans of East India had accepted his message, and in Magadha, farther south, the king and the nobility were his supporters. His disciples and lay followers numbered thousands and were drawn from all castes, and Buddhism had become a force to be reckoned with.

With all this, however, the spread of Buddhism was generally confined to the area covered by the usual itinerary of the Buddha, the country that lay between Benaras in the west and Rajagriha in the east, between Kapilavasthu in the north and Gaya in the south. The honour of having made Buddhism a world religion belongs mainly to the emperor Asoka and the leaders of the Third Council of Buddhism held in Pataliputra in the year 243, B. C. as we shall see later.



## CHAPTER IV

### GREEK INVASION OF INDIA AND RISE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

to understand the chain of events that led to the invasion of India by Alexander and its far-reaching effects on Indian culture, we have now to leave India for a while and take up the political developments in the west from where we left in the first chapter. The Assyrian empire, as we have seen, checked the southward movement of Aryan tribes who had settled down in the north and east of it. The northern settlers were known as Medes, and the easterners as Persians. The Medes who had helped the Chaldeans to overthrow the Assyrian empire were in the beginning more powerful than the Persians, and during the time of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors ruled an empire of considerable extent north of Babylon.

In the sixth century B. C., were born two great leaders of men among the Medes and Persians: Zoroaster and Cyrus. Zoroaster, a religious leader, was born a Mede; he preached that reality was essentially dual, constituting of Ahuramazda, the God of Righteousness with his attendant Mitras, God of Light, and Ahriman, the Genius of Evil, the two in eternal conflict. The Medes, however, did not pay much heed to the new cult, not at any rate the king and the nobles; so Zoroaster left Media and went to Persia to see what the Persians thought of his religion. The Persians were interested. For Cyrus, the chief of the Persians, was an ambitious man jealous of the power of the Medes and wished to expand the frontiers of Persia and enhance its glory, and he found in the message of Zoroaster an instrument by which he could forge the

**Medes** and Persians into a formidable people; for a common religion, Cyrus saw, was the greatest unifying force in a people. Besides, the Medes and Persians had many things in common, and Zoroaster himself had considerable following in Media.

The sixth century B. C. was essentially an age of spiritual ferment the world over. The Buddha, as we have seen, was founding in India a new religion, and among the Jews, Isaiah was converting Yawheh, the tribal god of the Jews into Jehovah the only God of all nations. Thales of Miletus, in Asia Minor, was laying the foundations of western philosophy, and in the Far East, Lao Tse and Confucius, the greatest philosophers of China, were preaching the fundamentals of good living. And in Persia, the religion Zoroaster founded endured for a long time enriching Central Asian culture and influencing Buddhism, and has survived today among the Parsis of India.

It is not, however, with the religion of ancient Persia, interesting as it is specially because of its affinities to Indo-Aryan religions, that we are here concerned but with her political history.

#### PERSIANS AND GREEKS

The Persians were the first among Aryan peoples to be fired with imperialistic ambitions. Probably their close proximity to the ancient empires of Mesopotamia was the mainspring of this ambition. Anyway, Cyrus after accepting Zoroaster's religion, made himself master of both Persia and Media. On the western frontiers of Media was the kingdom of Lydia ruled by a king named Croesus, the richest king in the world if we are to believe Greek writers to whom the fabulous wealth of

Croesus became a legend. Cyrus conquered Lydia, and with the wealth thus acquired considered himself powerful enough to direct his attention to the conquest of Babylonia ruled by the descendants of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nabonidus, the emperor of Babylon at the time, was a well-meaning man with considerable literary skill and archaeological interests but utterly incompetent to foresee or combat the designs of so astute and energetic a military genius as Cyrus. Nabonidus' tolerant and peace loving nature led him to accept into Babylonia the gods and shrines of races other than the Babylonians, and this seems to have offended the powerful priests of Bel Marduk, the ancient god of Babylon. Cyrus took advantage of this discontent, and when his army knocked at the gates of Babylon, the treacherous priests opened the gates and the city fell to the Persians without a blow. Nabonidus was taken prisoner and Cyrus became the master of Babylon in 538 B. C. but he turned down a proposal from his advisers to shift his capital to Babylon; because, "soft countries", said he, "breed soft men". The priests of Bel Marduk, in the end, gained nothing by their treachery but lost all, as their power, temples and gods were all superseded by the religion of Zoroaster which received the patronage of Cyrus and his successors.

The Persians quickly learned the art of governing vast empires; imperial traditions had already been bequeathed to them by the Babylonians and they had only to bring efficiency and energy into it. Cyrus' son Cambyses conquered Egypt, and under his successor Darius the Persian empire reached the zenith of its glory. But Darius also planted the seed that was later to grow up and destroy the mighty power of Persia. The northern

borders of Darius' empire were constantly harassed by nomads known as Scythians, and his spies reported that the homeland of these hostile hordes were somewhere north of the Caspian Sea. And Darius decided to deal them a death blow by crossing into Europe and destroying their homeland. In this attempt he came up against the Greeks, that branch of the Indo-Aryan stock that had settled down in the Aegean area.

These Greeks had, after conquering the Minoans, absorbed much of their culture and learnt from them the art of seafaring. They had settled down in the rugged hills and valleys of Greece and built towns and cities along the coasts, and had settlements in Asia Minor. They were no empire builders, but thorough-going individualists who thought that men should live in small states, and great empires ruled by a central authority were hindrances to the full development of human personality. Though perpetually quarrelling among themselves, they were capable of uniting themselves, like the Aryan clans of East India, in times of emergency and common danger.

The Greeks had, of course, a religion of their own with a pantheon of gods and goddesses, but no powerful priestly class to organise, conserve and transmit religious wisdom, and as a consequence allowed a good deal of freedom to individuals in the matter of thought. These independent thinkers generally concerned themselves with life in this world; in fact, how to live a healthy and virile life, how to cultivate beauty and strength of person, and how to evolve forms of government that would ensure the greatest good to the largest number of citizens. Unlike the somewhat negative attitude of Buddhism, they developed a taste for good living and concerned them-

selves little about what happened after death. And some of the greatest philosophers of the ancient world belonged to Greece, and the reader must certainly be familiar with the names of the famous trio, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and of Pythagoras who, like Indians, believed in transmigration, a doctrine which found no favour with the generality of Greeks.

The Greeks were great lovers of sports, music and drama. By the eighth century B. C. the sports were so well organised in the city states of Greece that from 776 a festival of sports was held every four years in a place called Olympia in which all the city states took an active part; these sports, in fact, became a common bond of unity for the different states.

Of the Greek cities, the most important were Athens and Sparta. The Athenian form of Government was democratic, while Sparta was, what we may call, totalitarian. The Athenian democracy was no doubt different from ours. There was no adult franchise, and only the upper strata of Athenian society had the right of vote, and the major part of the population were slaves and aliens (a man was an alien in Athens as long as he was not formally given citizenship, no matter how long he and his ancestors might have lived in the city). Yet, in the ancient world the Athenian democracy achieved the widest distribution of political power, and became the inspiration of later European democracies.

The Greeks were viewing with alarm the expansion of the Persian empire which subjected their settlements in Asia Minor, but they felt powerless against the might of Persia. When Darius crossed the straits into European

territories which the Greeks considered their exclusive preserve, they decided to resist. Darius ignored the Greeks and pursued his plans to attack the Scythians; he marched into Europe, crossed the Danube and pushed farther north in order to reach the Scythian homeland when it was discovered that the wild horsemen who harassed the northern borders of Persia had no permanent homeland but were quite at home anywhere between the Atlantic and the Pacific. They refused to fight pitched battles but came to raid throughout day and night, killing and looting, and where resistance seemed stiff disappeared into regions inaccessible to Persians. After a long drawn out campaign Darius was forced to retreat but he left armies in Thrace and Macedonia. As the Greeks farther south continued to be hostile, he made an attempt to reduce them. He organised a Phoenician fleet to engage the Greek fleets, and landed his troops at Marathon in order to attack Athens. The Athenians were fighting for their hearth and homes and the Phoenicians for their pay, and the result was as could be expected. The Phoenician fleet was defeated in a naval action which made the position of the Persian troops on the mainland perilous, and Darius' army retreated leaving the fortunes of war with the Greeks undecided.

Darius did not make further attempts to reduce the Greeks but directed his energy towards consolidating and organising his vast empire efficiently. He built roads stretching for thousands of miles, organised transport, made the highways safe for commerce, and merchants from any nation could trade safely with the cities of the empire. Darius' empire was the largest known to history till the rise of the colonial empires of Europe; it stretched from the Danube to the Indus, from Lybia to Central



Asia, and was the greatest unifying force of the time. The capital was at Susa but Darius strengthened and beautified Babylon, Persepolis and Ecbatana. Darius was a man of culture as well as a great organiser and military genius; he was a generous patron of men of letters and science and in his time Babylon again became the cultural centre of the ancient world.

Xerxes, Darius' successor, pursued the war with the Greeks. He decided to crush them once for all, and assembled for the purpose a great army drawn from all parts of his empire and had in it a dreaded elephant corps from India. Greek writers have left us a detailed description of the army and naval units of the expedition and say such a gigantic operation was never undertaken by any general before; this is probably an exaggeration inspired by the Greek love of dwelling upon their power of fighting against odds. Anyway, the military operations of Xerxes must have been on a grand scale, and its naval units were made up of Phoenicians who were considered the best seamen of the time.

At first the Greeks were struck with terror, but in the end the cities joined in a confederacy and decided to fight. The defence of their difficult terrain was well organised. The army of Xerxes crossed the Dardanelles (480 B.C.) but its progress was arrested at the Pass of Thermoplae by the stiff resistance of some 1400 men led by the Spartan Leonidas. After this resistance was overcome, the Persian army poured into Greek cities. The Greek city of Thebes was overwhelmed, and it surrendered. The Athenians finding their position hopeless abandoned their city and it was burnt. It appeared that the Persian ambition was at last realised. But an unexpected

turn of events completely dashed Xerxes' hopes and all but ruined the vast hosts of Persia. The Athenian fleet was still intact, the Persians were not so good in naval warfare as on land, and the Phoenicians again let them down. In the battle of Salamis, the Athenian fleet inflicted a severe defeat on the Persian armada and the exultant Greeks nearly cut off the Persian army by blocking the straits, and it was with difficulty that Xerxes pulled out his army from Greece.

Though there was no further invasion of Greece by Persia, the embittered Greeks kept alive the memory of Persian aggression and the sufferings it caused; poet, demagogue and historian dwelt upon the need for retaliation, but it was not given to a Greek to lead an expedition against Persia but to a Macedonian.

Macedonia, north of Greece, was an insignificant principality at the time of Darius' invasion but later, under king Philip, it became an important kingdom. Philip was shrewd and ambitious and, unlike the Greeks, thought well of great empires, and was jealous of the power, grandeur and wealth of Persia. He wished to organise the revengeful spirit of the Greek cities and lead an expedition against the Persian empire. For this purpose he reorganised his army and introduced a new technique in attack, based on a battle array which later came to be known as the Macedonian Phalanx; it mainly consisted of a closely packed and heavily armed infantry formation in the centre with mobile units of cavalry on the flanks, both working together. This new technique was in no small measure responsible for the phenomenal success of the Macedonians in their war with Persia and other countries of the East.

When Philip broached the subject of an invasion of Asia by the Greeks under his leadership, the Greeks ridiculed the idea. For the Greeks, though of the same stock as the Macedonians, were culturally much more advanced than the Macedonians whom they used to call 'barbarians'. But barbarians could be more warlike than cultured people, and Philip decided to claim by arms what he could not get by persuasion. So in 338 B.C. he marched into Greece and his Phalanx easily defeated a coalition of Greeks under Thebes and Athens. After this punishment, the Greeks chose Philip as their leader, and the Macedonian king, in his turn, allowed the cities to enjoy their traditional independence in their internal affairs.

#### ALEXANDER

While Philip was working out his plans for the invasion of Persia, he was assassinated, and in the year 336 B.C. the kingship of Macedonia passed on to Alexander, Philip's son who was then twenty years old. The Greeks, under a mistaken notion that the young prince would not be able to hold them in subjection, revolted under the leadership of Thebes, and Alexander put down the rebellion with a strong hand and completely destroyed Thebes. After this, the Greeks found no difficulty in accepting the leadership of Alexander.

Alexander in his younger days had Aristotle for his tutor. No two men could have been more different than this tutor and his pupil, though each was great in his own way. Aristotle was a philosopher and a man of science, a staunch adherent of the Greek tradition that men should live in cities and not in empires, a refined and mature intellect. Alexander, on the other hand, was an impetuous

and intrepid soldier, inclined to fits of cruelty and generosity, a dreamer of world dominion, a great conqueror of nations but often a slave to his own passions; he was so prodigal of his vital energies that he crowded the achievements and dissipations of an age in a short life and died at the age of thirty three.

Anyway, Aristotle and Alexander got on well. The philosopher often compromised his views when Alexander proved, by his brilliant conquests, that it was pleasant to live in great empires, especially if one was at the top; besides Alexander generously' endowed Aristotle's research institutes and even sent specimens from distant lands for his botanical gardens. Aristotle, in his turn, went to the extent of defending his pupil when he claimed to be a god and the Athenians challenged the preposterous claim. But all this was yet to come.

After the defeat of Thebes, Alexander organised the armies and navies of Greece and started on his campaign against Persia. In 334 B.C. he crossed the Hellespont. Persia at this time was ruled by a weakling who went by the name of Darius III. He moved against Alexander. But it would appear he could not fight without inspiration from his harem, and ponderous camps of women moved with him. Alexander defeated Darius at the battle of Issus, and in the flight for life the Persian emperor forgot his harem, his mother, wives and daughters, all of whom fell into the hands of the Macedonians.

After the battle of Issus, Alexander did not wish to proceed straight to the Persian capital lest the allies of Persia should rise in his rear. So he started reducing those peoples who were likely to give trouble, and the Phoenicians proved the toughest to break. After a long

drawn out campaign of two years, he took Tyre and Sidon, the greatest Phoenician strongholds, and then marched into Egypt. The Egyptians, groaning under Persian tyranny for generations, welcomed him as a liberator. He founded the city of Alexandria, and visited the shrine of the Egyptian god Amon in the desert, and the learned priests revealed to him that he, Alexander, was not a man but a god, in fact, the son of Zeus; for his information they also declared that the Egyptian god Amon was the same as the Greek Zeus and renamed their god Zeus-Amon. All this highly flattered the vain Macedonian who from now on started assuming the airs of a god.

The final battle with the Persians were fought in Arbela in the year 331 B. C. and the Persians suffered an ignominious defeat. Darius fled hotly pursued by the Greeks; he escaped the Greeks but was assassinated by one of his own officers. And thus the whole Persian empire lay at Alexander's feet.

It was the grandeur and pomp of the great cities and palaces of Persia that struck the imagination of Alexander rather than the greatness of his own achievements. The Macedonian was a pauper in comparison with the great wealth of the Persian cities accumulated for generations, and Alexander loved the imperial way of life and the Persian ladies. He married Roxana, a Bactrian princess, and encouraged his followers to marry into the noble families of Persia.

But Alexander's followers were not altogether happy about these innovations. They thought that his ambitions would stop with the conquest of Persia after which they hoped to return to their homeland. But Alexander had other ideas; he wished to conquer the whole world

and decided to push into India. Those who objected to this were promptly executed. He became notorious for his ungovernable temper and divine pretensions, and in a drunken brawl even killed his closest associate Clitus who had once saved his life in a dangerous situation. Well, a god could do no wrong, and outliving a conspiracy to assassinate him, Alexander led his armies into India.

The Panjab at the time was divided into several principalities like the clan states of East India, but seeing this common danger these states combined in a confederacy and chose a brave prince named Porus as their leader. The Indians put up a good fight but the Macedonian veterans won in the end. Alexander's own historians have left accounts of the bravery of the Indians who fought him. The victor was so taken by the courage and noble bearing of Porus that he granted him honourable terms and restored him to his principality.

Alexander wished to continue his conquests and proceed to the Gangetic plain but his soldiers at last had their say. They wanted to return, and neither persuasions nor threats were of avail. Hence part of Alexander's army sailed down the Indus under Admiral Nearchus and returned to Persia by way of the sea while the remaining was led by Alexander himself along the coast of Mekran. When Alexander reached Persia, the charm of the great cities and the fair women again held him. He married two Persian ladies, and decided to settle down in Persia. It was his intention, it would appear, to unite the Persians and Greeks into a mighty nation and found a religion in which he was to be the main deity for worship. But Fate decreed otherwise, for in the year 323 B. C. this great conqueror of mighty lands died of a fever caused by a malarial parasite.

Alexander had a child by Roxana but before his death Alexander had declared that his empire should go not by heredity but to the strongest man. But there were many strong men in Greece and Macedonia, and a civil war started among them for power; when peace was restored Alexander's vast conquests were divided into three main empires, the Macedonian Empire in the west, under Antigonus II, Egyptian Empire under Ptolemy and the Selucid Empire in the east, under Seleucus, in which was included Alexander's Indian conquests.

The conquest of Alexander and its importance in ancient history have been much exaggerated. The reason for this is that Alexander himself had able panegyrists who have left us detailed accounts of his campaigns, and European historians, who came later, generally exaggerated the greatness of his exploits in order to show the superiority of Europeans over Asiatics. As a matter of fact, the Persian empire was as great in extent if not greater than Alexander's conquests, and compared with its two centuries' stability, the Macedonian campaign was a mere wild goose chase. Again compared with the maturity and wisdom of some of the great emperors of the Mesopotamian world, Alexander was an erratic youth utterly lacking in political acumen.

Anyway Alexander's historians have left us more detailed accounts of cultural diffusion in his time than their predecessors and these are valuable to the historian; further as far as India was concerned, the Macedonian invasion, for the first time, fired Indians with imperial ambitions and brought them into active contact with the western world.

## CHANAKYA AND CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA

The Indo-Aryans who settled down in the Panjab and pushed down the Gangetic plain generally followed their ancient tribal traditions and a few clans expanded the frontiers of their principalities and built up sizable kingdoms known as Mahajanapathas. There were, in the Buddha's time, as we have seen, some sixteen of these Mahajanapathas in northern India, and the rest of the Aryans lived in small clan states. Those ancient stories of world dominion claimed by some Indian kings who wished to perform Asvamedha were, it would appear, inspired more by a love of pageant and ritual than by the actual fact of extensive conquests. But the Greek invasion of India fired at least one Indian with the need for a strong central government in India which could successfully withstand foreign aggression and keep the turbulent little kingdoms under effective control. He was the Brahmin Chanakya, known to history also as Kautilya (the cruel) because of the harshness of his doctrines and methods.

Chanakya picked out a young firebrand named Chandragupta for the execution of the great plans he had in view. According to a legend, Chandragupta was of low birth and belonged to a Sudra sub-caste of peacock tamers, and hence adopted the peacock as the emblem of his dynasty when he built up an empire. More likely, the peacock was the totem of the tribe to which Chandragupta belonged. Anyway, it is clear that he had something to do with peacocks, for the word Maurya by which his empire came to be known signifies peacock, and this bird was the emblem of the Mauryans.

King Ajatasatru during the Buddha's time, it may be mentioned, became a powerful monarch by defeating a



coalition of clans known as the Vajjan Confederacy. The dynasty of Ajatasatru was replaced by that of Sisu Naga, and this Naga dynasty itself was overthrown by Mahapadma, the founder of the Nanda dynasty; at the time of Alexander's conquest of India, a descendant of Mahapadma was ruling the important kingdom of Magadha with its capital at Pataliputra, near modern Patna.

It is said that Chanakya was first attached to the court of the Nanda king but left it because of a slight, and lived for revenge. This seems very unlikely; for Chanakya's work *Arthasastra* shows him as a man, indifferent to pettiness and little insults, but always with an eye on major problems. Though a Brahmin, Chanakya was not particularly loyal to his caste. He was a statesman of the type of Machiavelli, who believed that the happiness of mankind lay in a well-organised state ruled by a monarch with dictatorial powers; further, a king's policy, he maintained, was to be based not on the supposed wisdom of ancestors but on the needs of the times; religion was good enough as long as it helped the state, and the king was to rely for stability on a standing army and an efficient spy system which kept him well-informed of the designs of neighbouring kings and the disaffections of vassals and governors. He cared little for the teachings of the Vedas, of the Buddha and Mahavira, was remotely interested in what happened after death but was fully preoccupied with what was to be done before. As a statesman and patriot, the invasion of Alexander and the poor resistance offered by his countrymen pained him, but for the military genius of Alexander he had the greatest respect. He is even said to have had an interview with Alexander and introduced his protege Chandragupta to the Macedonian.

Be that as it may, Chanakya trained the impetuous young Chandragupta in his theories of state, and the young man was of a like mind. He raised an army of mercenaries in the Panjab with the money Chanakya obtained for him (the statesman, it would appear, went to the extent of minting counterfeit coins in order to raise the funds) and Chandragupta managed to found a principality from where he successfully attacked the Nandas and became king of Magadha. From now on, the expansion of the Mauryan empire went on uninterrupted till Chandragupta's death. After consolidating his conquests in East India, Chandragupta advanced westward and overrunning the Panjab came up against the Greek kingdom of Seleucus. A war ensued and Seleucus was defeated and forced to surrender all territories this side of the Hindu Kush to the Mauryan; as a complimentary gesture, Chandragupta gave Seleucus a handsome present of 500 war elephants.

The treaty of friendship signed by the two monarchs was cemented by a matrimonial alliance and Seleucus gave his daughter in marriage to Chandragupta. More than this, he sent an envoy named Megasthenes to Chandragupta's court who wrote a brilliant account of Pataliputra, Chandragupta's capital, and his kingdom. Megasthenes' original work was lost but copious extracts are preserved in the works of later writers, and from these accounts we get a pleasing picture of the Mauryan empire. The capital, Pataliputra, according to Megasthenes, was a well fortified city, almost impregnable, about nine miles in length and a mile and a half broad, with a moat, 600 ft. wide, running round the walls. The buildings were of bricks and wood, and Chandragupta's palace had many wonders in it. Megasthenes was particularly struck by the prosperity and peace in the kingdom,

the pageant and processions of the emperor, and his bodyguards of Amazons. Chandragupta's army consisted of 600,000 infantry, 300,000 horse, 9,000 elephants and a great many chariots. There were ministers in charge of several affairs of state; the country was well governed, the roads were safe for travellers and merchants, great irrigation projects were undertaken and executed with skill, and agriculture and trade flourished.

The accounts of ambassadors are not, however, very reliable as they were courtesy bound to paint only the brighter side of the country whose guests they were. From the tempo of *Artha Sastra* which, among other things, mention treachery as essential to a king's policy, it would appear, suspicion dominated the king and his court, Chandragupta lived in constant dread of the poison and the dagger, and many a powerful noble and king's relative, we may guess, disappeared in an unaccountable manner. Anyway, Chandragupta was no megalomaniac; he was ruthless in dealing with people whom he considered a danger to his position, especially as he had no hereditary right to his kingdom but was something of an usurper, and his policies and practices were aimed at bringing peace and prosperity to his kingdom while adding strength and prestige to his title by all means at his command.

By about 310 B. C. Chandragupta's empire was firmly established and consolidated. It was the first Indian empire of importance and it stretched from Afghanistan to the Bay of Bengal, from Kashmir to Mysore and has never been surpassed in extent by any Hindu king before or after. The capital was Pataliputra but there were viceroys in Taxila, Ujjain and other important centres far removed from the capital.

After the peace with Seleucus, the Mauryans and the Greeks lived in perfect harmony, and there were several Greek settlements in the Mauryan empire especially in the Panjab and the North West which were once part of the empire of Seleucus. Indians thus came into active contact with the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean cultures, and from Egypt and Greece to Magadha the ancient world began to develop many cultural ties. Indian, Persian and Greek craftsmen worked side by side in the frontier province of Gandhara, and scholars of all these countries, we can be sure, met in important cities and compared notes on astronomy, medicine and even on secret cults and mysteries of religion. The foundations of the Indo-Greek style of art and architecture were laid in Gandhara, Greek gods got into Indian pantheon and were given Brahmanic garbs, and the Greeks, we can be sure, learnt Indian religion and philosophy especially at Taxila, in close proximity to the Greek kingdom of Bactria, was a great centre of learning at the time.

The Mauryan empire was well known in the west, and the Greek kingdoms that stretched from Afghanistan to Macedonia and to Egypt became acquainted with the peoples of India. Indian elephants were specially prized in the west, and several Greek monarchs had elephant corps in their army.

There was, thus, a free flow of ideas and trade between India and the west on a scale hitherto unknown; even at the time of Persian domination when all countries between the Danube and the Indus were under a single ruler, Indian ideals and wares do not appear to have travelled far beyond Babylon. The reason was probably the absence of a power in India who could deal on terms

of equality with her giant western neighbour; but Chandragupta's power was respected by all the important kingdoms of the world west of the Hindu Kush, and his grandson, as we shall see, found no difficulty in establishing contacts with these kingdoms on terms of equality.

Chandragupta in his old age was overcome with a sense of frustration and the futility of empire. There is something in the air of India that works against excessive worldly ambition. According to a Jain tradition Chandragupta abdicated in favour of his son, and became a Jain monk and retired to a monastery in Pataliputra. Bihar then as now was a region of frequent visitations of famine, and in a year of drought when the population could not support the monks, the royal recluse, it would appear, led the whole community of Jain monks from Magadha to Shravana Belgola in Mysore and settled down here. And Shravana Belgola, under Chandragupta's guidance, developed into an important centre of Jainism and continued to be so far a long time.



## CHAPTER V

### EXPANSION OF INDIAN CULTURE UNDER ASOKA

WE know very little about Bindusara, Chandragupta's son. No great political events disturbed his reign, and he seems to have followed the general principles of statecraft left by his illustrious father. He did not add anything to Chandragupta's empire, nor did he lose any considerable portion of it. On Bindusara's death in 272 B. C. the Mauryan empire, about the same size as during Chandragupta's time, passed on to Asoka, son and successor of Bindusara.

About Asoka we have a wealth of information both from the records in stone he himself has left and from Buddhist religious literature. As a prince he was his father's viceroy in Ujjain and at this time he was, perhaps a keen adherent of Chanakya's political theories. On Bindusara's death he proceeded to Pataliputra but was not crowned immediately. There is a time lag of four years between Bindusara's death and Asoka's coronation, and the numerous inscriptions he has left are discreetly silent about this period in Asoka's life. The Buddhist scriptures, though not very reliable as historical documents, give a clue. It would appear Bindusara was rich in progeny and had a hundred sons (not unlikely for a Mauryan emperor who practised unlimited polygyny) and there were several claimants for the throne who waged a fratricidal war of succession in which Asoka came out successful. It is even related that he was extremely ruthless in dealing with his rivals and had them all executed, which action was perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the *Artha Sastra* which is tireless in reminding kings of the need for destroying

the rivals of one's own household, as "princes like crabs eat their own kind".

Anyway, Asoka during his viceroyalty at Ujjain and immediately after his accession to the throne was no soft ruler, and decided to expand the frontiers of his empire. It would appear the Kalingans, a seafaring people who inhabited the Orissan coast, were not subject to the Mauryans, and it is not clear why Chandragupta and Bindusara did not take the trouble of subduing them. Probably they were the friends and allies of the Mauryans who left them to enjoy their freedom. Anyway, Asoka decided to bring them under the Mauryan yoke and invaded their country without any provocation whatsoever. The spirited Kalingans resented this wanton aggression and decided to keep their independence or perish in the attempt. They fought valiantly against the mighty hosts of the Mauryan but in the end were defeated. The carnage was terrible. Asoka on viewing the battle field did not gloat over his victory and glory, but was stricken with remorse and turned away from the battle field in disgust, the only instance perhaps of a victorious king having thought the worse of himself for the bloodshed he had caused.

The teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira were probably familiar to Asoka, but till now he had preferred the teachings of *Artha Sastra*. After the conquest of Kalinga, however, the words of the Buddha, "the conquest of self is the greatest conquest of all" seemed to ring in Asoka's ears. At the time of this spiritual crisis in his life, Asoka came under the influence of a Buddhist teacher named Upagupta who initiated him into Buddhism. From now on, Asoka gave up all ambitions of expanding the frontiers of

his empire and turned his energy for spreading the message of the Buddha not only in his own empire but even to distant lands.

#### BUDDHIST COUNCILS

One of the most important activities of the emperor as a Buddhist was the convening of a Synod of monks, in 243 B. C. in order to fix the Buddhist canon and bring about some unity and discipline among the many sects of monks that had sprung among the Buddhists and were quarrelling among themselves about doctrine, dogma and discipline. The Synod held under Asoka in Pataliputra is known in the Buddhist world as the Third Council and to understand the sequence, we may now digress for a moment and narrate the story of the first two Councils.

The first Council met shortly after the death of the Buddha in order to collect his sayings and fix doctrine and discipline, especially as the Buddha had left no permanent instructions for the guidance of his disciples. 500 monks are said to have taken part in the deliberations under the learned sage Kasyapa, and the most competent disciples, those who were thought well of by the Buddha himself, were asked to repeat what they had heard from the Master. Vinaya or rules of monastic discipline were repeated by a revered monk by name Upali; Sutra or ethical precepts were recited by Ananda, a cousin of the Buddha who was in constant attendance on him, and metaphysical doctrines by the learned president himself. This triple text known as *Tripitaka* (three baskets) was then arranged under two heads: Vinaya and Dhamma. The Buddha, as we have seen, did not believe in revelations and scriptures, and the Vinaya and Dhamma were



not considered infallible texts but source books of conduct and guidance.

The First Council dispersed and in the absence of a central authority to enforce discipline, bold monks began to interpret Vinaya and Dhamma as they liked. Some of them even argued that the rules of discipline recited by Upali in the First Council were meant only for the immediate disciples of the Blessed One and not for later generations, while others produced versions of Vinaya which claimed inspiration from Upali himself but teaching a much less rigorous discipline than the existing Vinaya. The exemptions claimed by the easy going monks, as the dissenters were called, were ten : 1) Privilege of accepting cash gifts in addition to food; 2) eating a second sound meal in the afternoon; 3) drinking stimulating beverages; 4) power of initiation into the order and hearing confessions in private houses; 5) use of comfortable seats; 6) relaxation of monastic discipline in remote and out-of-the way places; 7) the privilege of obtaining dispensation from the order after infringement of any rule; 8) drinking whey; 9) putting salt aside for future use; and 10) the right of quoting precedents as valid excuse for relaxing discipline.

These ten points of dispute and many others violently shook the Buddhist world and a Second Council was thought necessary for settling the dispute. The Second Council was held at Vaisali about 350 B. C. and seven hundred monks took part in it. The main points of discussion were the ten lax practices. The easy going monks fought hard for their privileges; the protracted discussions went on for eight months when the easy going were exhausted, and the austere ones were still found

energetic and pugnacious. The ten lax practices were declared unlawful and prohibited.

When this trouble had thus ended, the essential genius of Indian intellectuals for metaphysical speculation began to assert itself. Although the Buddha had declared as unprofitable all speculations about the exact nature of Nirvana, the origin and end of the universe and other abstruse matters, and had taught his disciples to lead a life of moral excellence, some of the more curious of the monks wished to obtain some insight into mysterious subjects. As speculation on these verities developed, eighteen versions of reality were propounded by monks of equal learning, wisdom and piety, while those who quarrelled over minor matters on monastic discipline were even more. When Asoka became a convert to Buddhism, these eighteen major schools were violently disputing among themselves, and the emperor wished to reconcile these differences in a free discussion and fix the Buddhist Canon once for all. Hence the Third Council of Buddhism met in Pataliputra in the year 234 B. C. and an elder named Moggaliputra was elected as its president.

Doctrines and discipline were freely discussed in the Council and the Canon was fixed. The language selected for the Canon was Pali, the literary form of Magadhi the official language of the Mauryan Empire. It was this text that later came to be known as the Pali Canon, the earliest of Buddhist Canons, the main basis for all others, and still followed by the Hinayana or southern school which is at present predominant in Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia.

Another important activity of the Council was the discussion and passing of a resolution which stressed the

need for organising regular missions for the propagation of Buddhism in and outside the Mauryan empire. This was, in fact, the first move in world history to propagate religion through missionaries. The originator of the idea was probably Asoka himself, though Ceylonese chronicles indicate that the resolution was introduced by the president himself. Anyway, both the president and the emperor were of a like mind, and Asoka organised his vast resources for equipping and financing the missions while the personnel were probably selected by Moggaliputra and controlled by him.

#### INSCRIPTIONS OF ASOKA

We get a wealth of information about these missions and about the emperor's religious activities generally from his rock cut inscriptions and edicts carved on polished monoliths known as Asoka Pillars. Many of Asoka's inscriptions have been discovered and their range extends from the Himalayan region to Mysore, from Khyber to Pataliputra. In fact wherever people met, in the market place, at important cross roads, and even in villages and out of the way places, the emperor's commandments in stone exhorted the people to lead the good life, stating what he himself was doing in that direction. These inscriptions are not the work of a pious hypocrite but bear the genuine stamp of sincerity of a contrite soul. The emperor does not appear as a mere propagandist of Buddhism; in fact he seldom mentions the Buddha and his teachings. The emphasis is on the universal virtues of forbearance, tolerance, obedience etc. and only in his prohibition of animal sacrifices does he show himself as a Buddhist. "Parents must be obeyed; truth must be spoken; respect for life must be cultivated; teachers should be

obeyed:" says one edict. "All men are my children; and I desire their happiness and prosperity in this world and the next;" says another, "envy, lack of exertion, harshness, anger, laziness are to be eschewed; reverence should be shown to religious men of all persuasions, to Brahmins, Jain ascetics and Buddhist monks."

In the inscription known as rock edict No. 13, the emperor records his missionary activities. After relating the conquest of Kalinga and the emperor's remorse, the famous text runs: "So, what is conquest through Dharma is now considered to be the best conquest by the 'beloved of the gods' (Asoka describes himself in these edicts as such). And such a conquest has been achieved by the beloved of the gods not only here in his own dominions but also in the territories bordering on his own dominions, as far away as the distance of six hundred Yojanas where the Yavana king named Antiyoka (Antiochus) is ruling; farther where four other kings named Turamaya (Ptolemy), Antikini (Antigonos), Magas, and Alikasundara (Alexander) are ruling, and towards the south where the Cholas and Pandyas are living and as far as Tamraparni." These kings have been identified as the rulers of Syria (Antiochus), Egypt (Ptolemy) Macedonia (Antigonos), Cyrene (Magas) and Epirus (Alexander) who were contemporaries of Asoka, while the Chola and Pandyan kingdoms lay south of the Mauryan empire. Tamraparni was the old name for Ceylon. In rock edict No. 2, the Chola, Pandya, Keralaputra and Satiyaputra are mentioned as Kingdoms lying south of the Mauryan empire while Antiochus is again mentioned as the western neighbour.

The inscriptions of Asoka throw a flood of light on India's political and cultural contacts with the outside

world. None of the countries to the east of India has been mentioned nor is China anywhere in the picture. But the Greek empire of Antiochus had a common border with Asoka's dominions, and the Mauryan empire had diplomatic relations with all the great Hellenistic kingdoms of his time. There were, no doubt, Greek settlements in North West India, and it would appear from a later inscription that one of Asoka's governors in western India was a Greek.

With all this Greek influence on Indian culture during Asoka's time was not considerable. Of Asoka's inscriptions so far discovered two are in Kharoashti and the rest in Brahmi script, and none in Greek. Asokan art too shows not Greek but Persian influence. The reason for this is not far to seek; Alexander, as we have seen, looked to Persia for cultural guidance and adopted the customs and manners of the Persians, and Greek craftsmen during the period immediately following Alexander's death were studying Persian forms and styles in art and architecture. It took them time to master these styles and blend them with their own and only by the first century of the Christian era we find a distinct Indo-Greek school of art developing in the north west which came to be known as the Gandhara school.

#### MISSIONS OF ASOKA

We know little about the fate of the missions Asoka sent to the Hellenistic kingdoms. Buddhism made some impression in Persia but farther west, its success, if it had any, was negligible. The Greeks do not mention it, and this is important as they were generally interested in the religion and philosophy of all races they came in contact

with. No conversions of Greek kings or nobles by Asoka's missionaries are recorded in ancient Buddhist literature too.

The case was, however, different with the mission that went to Ceylon. It was headed by Mahendra, Asoka's son according to Ceylonese tradition, his brother according to the Indian tradition. The Sinhalese accounts say that the missionary and his companions flew to Ceylon (Arhats or Buddhist saints were believed to be capable of this feat), but Huien Tsang, from the traditions current in India at his time, mentions a less miraculous mode of transport. Mahendra seems to have gone to Ceylon by way of the Chola and Pandyan country preaching Buddhism in these regions and in Huien Tsang's time there were Buddhist shrines in the south that traced their origin to Mahendra.

Anyway in Ceylon the success of Mahendra's mission was complete. The king and the court along with the people accepted Buddhism, and shortly after, Mahendra's sister Sanghamitra who had become a nun, joined him with a branch of the Bo-tree. More of this when we deal with Ceylon; here we may however take note of the fact that Sanghamitra sailed to Ceylon from the Magadhan port of Tamralipti. In Asokan times Indian shipping had not developed to any considerable extent, especially direct sailing to the islands and the Malay Peninsula, but coastal traffic was brisk and there were regular sailings between Tamralipti and Ceylon along the East Coast, and between Barygaza (Broach) and Ceylon along the West Coast.

#### END OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

The Mauryan empire did not long outlive Asoka; the religious policy of Asoka was probably the reason for

this. For however much we may admire the teachings of saints and sages, a certain amount of harshness has always been found necessary for successful administration of an empire with its discordant elements and vast populations; no Buddhist emperor had ever been successful in ruling his dominions according to the doctrines of Panch<sup>\*</sup>Shila, and no Christian kings, not even the Popes, were able to rule strictly according to the Sermon on the Mount. Asoka, in his own words, converted the efficient intelligence organisation established by Chanakya into a religious body for promoting virtue in the empire and the officers were re-designated 'Overseers of Law'. Asoka is credited with having built 84,000 major Buddhist shrines; this may be an exaggeration, but the emperor's building programmes were extensive, and the quarrying and erecting of the monoliths known as Asoka Pillars went on uninterrupted throughout his reign; all this must have caused considerable hardships to the population. According to General Cunningham, the average weight of an Asoka Pillar is fifty tons, and "when the Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlak had one of them moved the comparatively short distance of 120 miles, it involved the use of enormous mattresses of cotton, and of a specially built carriage with twenty-one pairs of wheels. At each wheel toiled 200 men; an army of no less than 8,400 was thus employed, and this gives us some faint picture of the labour involved in the quarrying, polishing, sculpture and transportation of these amazing monoliths." While we in the twentieth century rightly feel obligated to the emperor for his great monoliths, we cannot escape a feeling that the propagation of the doctrine of non-injury by the emperor was not achieved entirely without injury to his contemporaries.

The forces of disruption that led to the fall of the Mauryan empire must have started towards the closing years of Asoka's reign. Historical evidence is lacking, but Buddhist literature, while generally treating of the wickedness of Asoka before his conversion and his piety after, gives indications of tragedy during the dotage of Asoka. His chief queen died, and the old emperor married a young lady named Tishyarakshita and there seems to have been a court faction headed by the lively queen who opposed the religious policy of the emperor; Asoka in his religious zeal neglected the affairs of state, emptied the treasury in the service of monasteries and lived the life of a monk. There are stories of the destruction of the Bo-tree, blinding of the heir-apparent Kunala, who was viceroy of Taxila, by the queen's orders and the flight of nobles from Taxila to Khotan in Central Asia, and the doting emperor pitifully asking his courtiers, "am I the King of this realm or some else?" The Buddhist literature is generally agreed that the great Asoka died penniless and forlorn.

Either towards the end of Asoka's reign or shortly after, the Greeks regained possession of the territories ceded by Seleucus to Chandragupta. Antiochus III of Syria expanded the frontiers of his empire and in 208 B.C. crossed into India. He met with little opposition, but did not care to push farther than the Seleucid boundary, and the Panjab again reverted into the little kingdoms of pre-Mauryan era.

In 184 B. C. Pushyamitra overthrew the last of the Mauryas and set up the Sunga dynasty. He was an ardent Hindu and wished to emulate the great Chandragupta Maurya; his success was but partial, for in 155 B. C., we hear of the Greek invader Menander who pushed down



from his Bactrian capital and, overrunning the Gangetic plain, advanced as far as the Sunga capital of Pataliputra. Menander seems to have come under the influence of a Buddhist monk named Nagasena who has left us a valuable work called *Milinda Panha*, (*questions of Menander*) in which the Buddhist philosophy of life and reality as taught at the time is ably propounded in dialogue form.

Anyway, Menander did not rule in the north west for long. There was now, after about three centuries of Greek and Mauryan dominance of the Khyber and Afghanistan, a fresh outburst of wild men from Central Asia which engulfed the Hellenistic kingdom of Bactria and poured forth torrents of horsemen into India, creating chaotic conditions in this country for about six centuries.



## CHAPTER VI

### INDIA IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA

FROM the fall of the Mauryan empire to the rise of the Imperial Guptas in the fourth century A. D. is a gap of about six centuries; the history of India of this period is a blank relieved by a few names of uncertain origins and dates. We hear of no great empires in the north, not even of strong kingdoms. The Sungas, as we have seen, failed to raise the fallen glory of the Mauryas; in the south the Andhras built up a sizable kingdom, though not in any way comparable to the Mauryan empire. The continuous tribal outbursts into North India had its repercussions in the south and made the stability of kingdoms all over India extremely precarious.

There was a particular reason for this large scale tribal movements into India at this period. In the west the powerful Roman empire had risen on the ruins of the Greek kingdoms, and extended from Germany to the Tigris-Euphrates valley and effectively stopped nomad movements into Europe and south west Asia. In China, the Han dynasty, after uniting all China, had started an aggressive policy of chasing the nomads out of the frontiers of China which were steadily advancing westward under vigorous emperors and generals. Thus caught between the expanding Hans and Romans, the tribes that roved the regions in between pressed against Central Asia and set in motion waves of tribal migration which overran the Greek kingdom of Bactria and, finding an easy inlet into India, poured into the Panjab and the Doab, and fanned out south and north. By the first century of the Christian era these tribes known in Indian legend as Sakas and to

Europeans as Scythians became dominant in the north west and western India. In course of time these wild horsemen were tamed and they accepted Indian culture and religion and were absorbed in the Indo-Aryan fold.

By the beginning of the Christian era, a tribe known as Kushans became powerful in north west India. Under their emperor Kanishka, of whom we will have occasion to speak later, the Kushans, towards the close of the century built up an empire comprising of the old Greek kingdom of Bactria, Kashmir, the Panjab and part of Central Asia.

Though an age of confusion, wars and of little kingdoms and large scale disturbances, the period was one of growth, assimilation and brilliant intellectual activity. Great empires ruled by able statesmen often tend to create uniformity and intellectual drabness; for instance what literature would have received state approval and patronage during Asoka's time was not likely to be a work like Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* or Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* but dreary sermons on the law of piety. The uncertainties of life and the opportunities of an age of confusion give rise to great adventure and romance. In Europe the dark age with its robber barons, pirates and civil wars, and in China the age of the Three Little Kingdoms as the period of confusion following the break up of the Han Empire was called, were essentially epochs of romance, of great literature and much daring. Similarly the period of trouble that intervened between the fall of the Mauryans and rise of the Guptas was essentially an age of growth, assimilation, intense intellectual activity, and above all adventure, travel overseas and colonisation. It was during this period that Nagarjuna and Asvaghosha, the two great doctors of the Buddhist church flourished; the epics and the *Code of Manu* took final form, and some of the *Puranas* were

compiled during this period. The main scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism were composed in this age, and an intense cultural intercourse between China and India developed, with the result Central Asia became predominantly Buddhist and China nearly so.

In this period of disaster and uncertainties, war assumed a new meaning. In the *Artha Sastra* war is mentioned as the last resort of a king after he had exhausted all other means of subjugating an enemy through strategem, causing disaffection in the kingdom and raising a rival, and even through assassination; war here is essentially a means to an end, the end being the power, prestige and stability of a state. But in the *Gita*, that cream of Hindu philosophy, war appears not as a means, but an end in itself, the pride, duty and glory of the Kshatriyas. In fact any gain sought through war was thought to vitiate its greatness; the soldier was not to concern himself with the results of the battle but only as to how he conducted himself during the course of action. This philosophy of the *Gita* had guided the true Hindu warrior all down the ages and was best expressed in the Rajputs to whom bravery in battle was all that mattered, and death in the battlefield an end in itself.

#### ANCIENT INDIAN SEAFARING

Just as the Han drive westward caused Central Asian tribal movements into India, these incursions dislodged vast populations from northern India. The Pallavas, for instance, an Indo-Parthian people who had settled down in the Panjab were driven to the South, and even beyond the seas to found colonies in South East Asia. Fortunately, however, Indian seafaring was fast developing, and the peoples of South East Asia were welcoming Indians

as they brought with them a superior culture and a better way of life; thus a good part of the dislodged population of India found an easy outlet into the lands beyond the seas. The peoples who met this new demand for overseas expansion were the maritime nations of the south and of the eastern seaboard who were now able to build ocean going ships carrying three or four hundred passengers and their belongings and sail direct to Malaya, Java and Sumatra and even beyond to the kingdoms of Indo-China. We may now give here some detailed attention to this development of Indian seafaring.

During Asoka's time eastern seafaring, as we have seen, had not developed among Indians to any considerable extent, but shipping in the Arabian sea was shared by them with the maritime nations of the west.

Direct sailing in the Arabian sea is believed to have started from 45 A. D. when an Egyptian mariner, named Hippaulus, by patient observation of the seasons, discovered the regularity of the monsoon winds. Prior to this discovery ships generally sailed hugging the coast, always in sight of land, ready to take shelter at the slightest sign of rough weather. After the discovery of the monsoon winds Hippaulus, throwing caution to the winds, plunged into the vast Arabian Sea from the mouth of the Red Sea, and guided by the western breeze reached Muziris on the West Coast of India in the then incredibly short time of forty days. When the direction of the wind changed with the onset of the North East Monsoon, Hippaulus sailed back to Egypt. From now on Egyptian fleets sailed regularly between the Red Sea and the Malabar Coast.

This is the story of the beginning of direct sailing of the Arabian Sea as narrated by Mediterranean writers.

But it would appear the art of direct sailing between South India and the coasts of Arabia and North Africa was known to Indians before this period but they had kept it a trade secret. The regularity of the monsoon winds, though unknown to Egyptians, must have been a familiar phenomenon to ancient South Indians whose agricultural activities depended solely upon the monsoon, and it is very likely that these seafaring people took advantage of the monsoon winds in the navigation of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. This belief gains strength from the story of an Indian sailor who was found drifting in the Red Sea and taken by the Egyptian Coastal Guards to Pharaoh Euergetes (second century B. C.). The geographer Strabo says that this Indian sailor piloted an Egyptian fleet to India; the statement is important, for it shows that the Indian knew certain secrets of navigation the Egyptians did not know.

Be that as it may, with the first century of the Christian era started a demand for Indian goods in the Roman markets which had far reaching effects on the commerce and history of the world in later ages. It was this demand for Indian commodities, we know, that led to keen trade rivalries between the Christian nations of Europe and the Muslims, the closing of the overland trade route by the Turks, and the search by the seafaring nations of Europe for new sea routes to India which resulted in the momentous discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

One of the important developments of the first century, as far as India was concerned, was the trade contact between the Roman empire and South India. When compared with the kingdoms of North India, those

of the South were noted for their stability and duration. Those alien invasions which annihilated many a kingdom in the north seldom reached the south; there were, no doubt, wars among South Indian rulers, but the victor usually respected the right of the defeated to the title to his kingdom and was content to levy a tribute or extract a formal declaration of vassalage.

By the first century of the Christian era, three maritime kingdoms of importance had risen in South India: The Chera, Pandyan and Chola kingdoms. The Chera kingdom corresponded roughly to the present Kerala state, the Cholas ruled on the Coromandel Coast and the Pandyan kingdom lay in between and included Cape Comorin. South Indians were particularly noted for their commercial acumen, and from very early times had organised trade guilds that had far flung overseas connections and settlements in foreign lands. Muziris, the capital of the Chera kingdom, was the most important emporium of international trade on the Malabar Coast, and Puhar (also known as Kaveripatanam) on the mouth of the river Kaveri, on the Coromandel Coast. The Pandyan capital Madura was an inland city but the Pandyans had ports on the West Coast of which Nelcynda or Nirkunram was the most important.

The rise of the Roman empire gave an impetus to India's trade with the west. Egypt and the Persian Gulf region became Roman provinces, and the Romans, though essentially militarists, could see the advantages of trade and actively patronised the Egyptians and Syrians who were already trading with India. The far famed commodities of South India, pepper, pearls, cardamom and other spices, and the fine Muslin fabrics, found a

ready market in the great emporia of the Roman world, and the profits were enormous. Egyptians, Syrians and Jews had their trading settlements in Muziris and it rose to be the main centre of transit trade between the Roman empire and the Far East. In the early centuries of the Christian era Muziris was a great cosmopolitan city which enjoyed the particular patronage of the Perumal as well as the Roman emperor. To look after the interests of the Roman nationals settled down in Muziris and to keep pirates off the coast, the Roman emperors had stationed two cohorts in Muziris. The city had a Roman temple. The Jews had already settled down there and were flourishing in the first century of the Christian era; according to the traditions of Kerala Christians it was in a ship belonging to one Habban the Jew that Apostle Thomas came to Muziris in the year 52 A. D. and introduced Christianity to India. Large number of hoards of Roman coins have been discovered in several parts of Kerala and adjoining Tamil districts, and from this it is even surmised that Muziris had an authorised Roman mint, and Roman coins were legal tender in the main cities of South India.

There were diplomatic relations between Rome and South Indian kingdoms. For the coronation of Augustus Caesar, the Pandyan king sent an embassy, and Pandyan used to keep Roman mercenaries as their body guards; Tamil literature speaks of these "dumb Mlecchas who could be seen at the palace gates."

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a work by an unknown author of uncertain date but believed to be of the early centuries of the Christian era, mentions twenty two major ports between the mouth of the Indus and Cape



Comorin while Ptolemy, writing in the fourth century enumerates about forty between the Cape and the mouth of the Ganges. This naturally shows a prosperous reign of trade. The balance of trade with the Roman empire was definitely in India's favour, for we hear of bitter complaints from the economists of the Roman empire who clamoured for restricting imports from India. Pliny was particularly harsh on the Roman ladies whose love of Indian pearls was causing considerable financial drain on the empire. "Our ladies," says Pliny, "glory in having pearls suspended from their fingers, two or more of them dangling from their ears, delighted even with the rattling of pearls as they knock against each other; and now at the present day, the poorer classes are even affecting them as people are in the habit of saying 'that a pearl worn by a woman in public is as good as a lictor walking before her;' more than this, they put them on their feet, and that not only on the laces of their sandals but all over their shoes; it is not enough to wear pearls, but they must tread upon them and walk with them under their feet as well.....I once saw Lollia Paulina, wife of the emperor Caius—it was not any public festival or any solemn ceremonial, but only an ordinary betrothal entertainment—covered with emeralds and pearls which shone in alternate layers upon her head, in her hair, in her wreaths, in her ears, upon her neck, in her bracelets and on her fingers, and the value of which amounted in all to 40,000,000 sesterces; indeed she was prepared at once to prove the fact by showing the receipts and acquaintance." Another Roman, Petronius the moralist, expressed horror at the immodesty of Roman ladies who went about clad in 'webs of woven wind' as he termed the Muslin imported from India. The balance of trade in India's favour was

estimated at 55,000,000 *sistereces* annunally (£: 500,000). "This," moralises Pliny, "is the price we pay for our luxuries and our women."

While shipping in the Arabian Sea was shared by Indians with Egyptians and others, India had the practical monopoly of shipping in the Eastern Seas. Chinese navigation was also developing fast but between Indo China and Ceylon, in Indonesia and the coastal regions of Burma, Siam, and the Malay Peninsula, Indian trading interests and shipping were more important. In fact from the dawn of history, from the time anything definite is known about them, the religion, art and architecture, literature and theories of government and law of the countries of South East Asia have been definitely Indian.

Though the ethnic affinities of the major part of the population of South East Asia were not with Indo-Aryans, the colonists and adventurers from India were mainly responsible for the building of a superstructure of Indian civilisation on the indigenous cultures of South East Asia, and most of the ruling dynasties in this region claimed their descent from royal houses in India or colonists from here. When exactly this colonisation of the East took place is not known; but the Chinese writer K'ang Tai who visited Funan (the principal kingdom in Indo-China at the time) in the third century of the Christian era found the ruling dynasty to be of Indian origin, founded by an adventurer named Kaundinya. In the beginning of the fifth century A. D. when the Buddhist pilgrim Fa Hien returned to China from Ceylon by sea, he visited *en route* Java and Sumatra where he found Brahminism in a flourishing state. All this would indicate that the Indianisation of South East Asia took place during the period of political

disturbances in India which intervened between the collapse of the Mauryan empire and the rise of the Guptas.

The question has often been asked as to which particular races or countries in India were responsible for this cultural conquest of South East Asia. Each Indian writer on the subject shows an inclination to make out that the people from the particular place from which he himself hails were the pioneers in the colonisation of South East Asia, and in the absence of positive evidence to the contrary, Bengal, Orissa, Gujerat, Andhra, Gandhara Maddhya Pradesh, and South India have claimed the honour of having carried Indian culture to the countries of the East. Perhaps European colonial expansion of the 16-18th centuries offers a parallel; the Portugese, the Dutch, the British, the French and the Danes, all had their colonies and dependencies in the East, though the pioneering started with the Portugese. Similarly several countries in India contributed towards the colonisation of South East Asia, and it must be remembered that during the period of Eastern seafaring India had no great empire but was divided into numerous independent kingdoms. Historians have however discovered close affinities between the Pallavas of South India and many of the dynasties of South East Asia and are of opinion that the Pallavas who had their capital at Conjeevaram, a South Indian Port, played an important role in the colonisation of the East.

No country in India, however, claimed suzerainty over any of the kingdoms of South East Asia. Politically the contact of South East Asia was with China and not with India. Chinese generally claimed overlordship in practically every country in the south; during weak Chinese

reigns any present offered by a goodwill mission was accepted as tribute and recorded as such in court annals and imperial claims usually ended here. But powerful emperors effectively interfered in the never ending wars of the kingdoms of South East Asia, sent punitive expeditions against the disrespectful and generally maintained the *status quo* in these regions. In fact, till the maritime Cholas in the eleventh century sent naval expeditions against the Sri Vijaya empire of Sumatra and started a hundred years war with them in which the Pandya and Sinhalese were dragged, politically, South East Asia remained under the Chinese sphere of influence and not under India.

#### THE NORTHERN EMPIRE OF KANISHKA

The first century of the Christian era was important in many other respects too. The birth of Jesus, the founder of the Second Empire of Belief, was in itself an event of great importance; for what Buddhism had done to the Far East, Christianity did to Europe. In the first century of the Christian era, the Apostle Thomas is said to have preached Christianity in India, and the Christians of Malabar, a flourishing community at present, trace the origin of their church to the Apostle. Though this community had lived in practical isolation and could not make its influence felt to any considerable extent in India, with the coming of the Portuguese and during the British rule India became familiar with Christian ideals and culture, and today Christians form the third biggest community in the country.

But our main concern here is with the expansion of Indian culture and not with the assimilation of other

cultures by India. And in this respect too the first century of the Christian era is of paramount importance to us. The official date of the introduction of Buddhism to China is considered 65 A. D. when, in response to an invitation of the Han emperor Ming Ti, a missionary monk of Central India by name Kasyapa Matanga travelled to China and built an establishment known as the White Horse Monastery in Loyang the then capital of China. Even more important than this was the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia in the first century of the Christian era under the Kushans.

The Kushans, as we have seen, overran the Bactrian kingdom and pushed into India. Their empire under Kanishka extended from Central Asia to the Doab and had for its capital Purushapura (Peshawar). The exact date of Kanishka is not known, but available evidence shows that he reigned in the first century of the Christian era. The Kushans were no doubt converted to Buddhism but in the process a good deal of Buddhism was converted into Kushanism. Kanishka was an ardent Buddhist, a great patron and propagandist of Buddhism, almost as great as Asoka, but the Kushan emperor's Buddhism was as different from the austere Asokan Buddhism as medieval Catholicism was from primitive Christianity. Unlike Asoka who was tireless in preaching humility, forbearance and the monastic virtues, Kanishka tried to impress the world by the grandeur of Buddhism. He did not inscribe in stone trite maxims, but erected in his capital a grand pagoda, four hundred feet in height, to which was attracted visitors from all over the world. While Asoka was content with the title of Priyadarsi (one who looks with compassion) or Devanampiya (beloved of the gods), Kanishka on his coronation assumed the fourfold epithet

of universal dominion which combines in itself the imperial claims of Persia, Rome, China and India. His epithet was Rajadhiraja (king of kings, Persian), Kaisera (Caesar, Roman), Devaputra (son of heaven, China) and Chakravartin (universal monarch, Indian). Thus he realized by a lively imagination what he could not by force of arms; anyway the titles indicate that he was conversant with the politics of Rome and China. His empire, it would appear, had common borders with China and Rome.

Anyway, Kanishka was great in his own way. He was a patron of learning and art, and the famous Buddhist scholar, saint and dramatist Asvaghosha lived in his court. The Gandhara school of art seems to have developed under his patronage, and the foundations of an indigenous school known as the Mathura school were laid in his reign; the artists of these schools, in keeping with the spirit of the age, showed wider sympathies in their themes and a better appreciation of the needs of life than Mauryan artists. The figures of the Buddha, which now began to appear in supersession of the older convention of representing him by symbols, were generally earthbound and true to life rather than spiritual, and religious themes were often set off against a lively background of seductive Yakshis, drinking couples, bathing beauties and Bacchanalian scenes.

The greatest gain of Kanishka's time was the expansion of Buddhism into Central Asia which along with Afganistan, Kashmir and the Panjab became one political unit; after Kanishka's reign Buddhism came to be looked upon by the peoples of Central Asia and by the nomads to the north as the religion of civilised mankind, and it was his

patronage of Buddhism, its art and literature, that was mainly responsible for thus raising the prestige of this religion.

Kanishka too, like Asoka, convened a synod of Buddhism in Kashmir. The reason for this is not far to seek. Even at the time of Asoka, all schools of Buddhism do not seem to have accepted the decision of the Third Council, although the prestige of the emperor prevented the rise of any serious forms of heresy. With the collapse of the Mauryan empire several schools of Buddhism rose and the incursions of wild hordes and their conversion made matters worse; to add to it, Magadhi and its literary form Pali in which the Canon was compiled in the Third Council waned in importance and there was a reaction among the more literary minded of the Buddhists in favour of Sanskrit, possibly because of the influence of Asvaghosha, an accomplished writer in this language. Tendencies were also rising among the complex population and diverse cultural elements of the time which viewed the austerity of the older schools as far too removed from the needs of life.

All these considerations made Kanishka convene a synod which is known in Buddhist ecclesiastical history as the Fourth Council. 500 monks took part in it. The Council compiled a new Canon which was based on the Pali text and the scriptures of a school called Sarvastivadin which seems to have been prevalent in Asoka's time but was not considered quite orthodox. The language of the Canon was Sanskrit. The new Canon was written down on copper plates and enclosed in stone boxes and buried. For unlike the members of the Third Council who wished to propagate their religion throughout the known world,

the monks of the Fourth Council (most of them were Kashmiris) considered Kashmir the only place where the true doctrine could be learnt and prohibited the taking away of the scriptures or copies thereof outside Kashmir. And the precious copper plates and their massive stone boxes wait under the earth today for the lucky archaeologist who may dig them out and write the history of Buddhism anew.





## CHAPTER VII

### RISE OF MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

WE have seen in the previous chapter that Buddhism, under the Kushans, was fast shedding its primitive simplicity and adapting itself to the complex cultural patterns India was developing under Persian, Central Asian and Greek influences. The races that settled down in India on the collapse of the Mauryan empire were warlike and virile, and to them the ancient ideals of Nirvana and the practical annihilation it implied made no great appeal. A more positive attitude towards life in this world and the next became necessary, and the doctors of the Buddhist Church, rising to the occasion, enlarged ancient ideals into what was known as the 'Mahayana' or Greater Vehicle of Buddhism; those who followed the old ideals were called by the Mahayanists 'Hinayanists' or followers of the Little Vehicle though these themselves preferred to style their denomination Thera Vada or the Doctrine of the Elders.

#### HINAYANA AND MAHAYANA

The doctrine of the Hinayana conformed more or less to the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha had taught self-reliance and self-exertion as the keynote of salvation; man has to be saved by his own works and not by the grace of gods. The Buddha himself claimed no power of saving souls, but described himself as a Path Finder, a person who showed the way to his followers and it was upto the latter to plod along the path shown by him. There were no gods too who could save a man by grace or mercy.

The ideal man of the older school or Thera Vada was the Arhat. An Arhat was a quiet, composed individual

rigidly practising the ten virtues, possessing great occult powers but seldom using these, and he passed, on death, into Nirvana. The emphasis here is on personal salvation, which is not altogether free from a kind of selfishness; the need for doing good to others, for tending the sick and alleviating the suffering of others was, no doubt, preached by the older school too, but these good deeds were done in order to accumulate one's own personal merits rather than out of love for others. The ideal was that of the Buddha, the perfected one, who passed on to Nirvana on death never more to be born into this world of suffering creatures.

The Mahayana thought this a lesser ideal, the greater one being to be among living beings till the end of time, to help the suffering, to diminish world suffering by ceaselessly combating it, to defer Nirvana till the last soul is saved. This is known as the Bodhisatva ideal in contrast to the older Buddha or Arhat ideal. The ideal person was not the Arhat or even the Buddha who passed into Nirvana on death, but the Bodhisatva or Buddha-to-be, who could pass into Nirvana if he wanted, as he had the necessary qualifications and accumulated merit, but deliberately vowed to defer Nirvana in order to live many lives in many planes and suffer with the worlds as long as there was suffering in the worlds.

Bodhisatvas were, no doubt, known to the Hinayana. In fact, Gautama before his enlightenment was a Bodhisatva; further previous to his last birth as the son of Siddhodhana he had lived thousands of lives doing good to others and accumulating merit, and over five hundred of these birth stories are narrated in the *Jataka Tales* of the Hinayana Canon; again Gautama before his last descent to earth

was residing in Tusita heaven abiding his time and on his departure from the celestial abode he enthroned Maitreya (Metteya, Pali) as the President of the Tusita heaven; Maitreya is now awaiting in this heaven abiding his time, and will descend to the earth to preach the Law anew when it will have become unintelligible through human degeneration.

But Hinayana knows only Maitreya as the living Bodhisatva and his present role is passive, just to abide his time; he is not worshipped by Hinayanists and seldom prayed to. But the Bodhisatvas of the Mahayana are different. In theory every man who leads a good life is a potential Bodhisatva, and many a saint, doctor and pious king has been accepted by the Mahayana as a Bodhisatva. The more important Bodhisatvas, however, form a class by themselves and are supernatural beings, but the doctrine of transmigration and their appearance in many forms, and their rebirth in many planes as humans, animals or celestials make their lot one with other living beings though they have Paradises of their own into which the virtuous, on death, retire for enjoying the rewards of their good deeds. A knowledge of some of the more important of these Bodhisatvas is necessary for an understanding of Mahayana Buddhism and its doctrines, and sketches of some of the most popular Bodhisatvas of the Mahayana pantheon are given below.

Avalokitesvara (literally the Lord who looks down from heaven) is the most important of Mahayana Bodhisatvas; he has many names of which one of the most popular is Padma Pani. He was unknown in India in the time of Asoka, but by the second century of the Christian era he became an important deity of the Mahayana

pantheon. He appears as an all-merciful saviour, and devotion to him is particularly recommended. "He saves those who call on him from shipwreck, and execution, from robbers and all violence and distress. He saves too from moral evils, such as passion, hatred and folly. He grants children to women who worship him." Originally he was a sexless deity, something like an angel of Christian mythology but in Tibet he became a full-blooded male deity and in China, Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy. He is believed to be of Persian origin but his attributes and forms are many, like those of Hindu deities, and as a saviour and a god of mercy he resembles Vishnu of the Hindu pantheon.

Manjusri, the next important Bodhisatva of the Mahayana pantheon, is a god of intellectuals, a patron of art and literature. He too is a saviour of souls and enjoys, like Kama Deva of the Hindus, eternal youth, but he is mainly the favourite of the thinker and those engaged in meditation. He is said to be of Chinese origin, and his name is usually connected with the sacred mountain Wutai-shan in the province of Shan-si.

The Mahayana also recognizes Maitreya. Other important Bodhisatvas of the Mahayana are Samantabhadra the all gracious (popular in China and Tibet), Vajrapani (wielder of the thunderbolt, and as such, connected with the Hindu god Indra), and Kshitigarbha who is only second in importance to Avalokita in China and Japan.

The Mahayana, however, does not stop with the worship of Bodhisatvas, but have Buddhas of definite theistic leanings. Gautama Buddha, it may be recalled,

used to say that he was but one of the world-teachers, and many had preceded him and many would follow him. The Hinayana maintained that twenty four Buddhas preceded Gautama, and Maitreya would follow him. Gautama Buddha, as a historical figure, has a central place in the Hinayana and as such enjoys an importance not given to the other Buddhas. But in the Mahayana, Buddhas are innumerable and Gautama Buddha, or Sakyamuni as he is generally called in the Mahayana, is an insignificant figure, just an emanation from mighty cosmic Buddhas. Five of these, known as Dhyani Buddhas, are particularly important as they are said to be the presiding geniuses of the present Kalpa or World Cycle. These Dhyani (meditative) Buddhas are Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratna Sambhava, Amitabha and Amogha Siddha. Above all these Dhyani Buddhas are the Adi Buddha or Primal Buddha who pervades everything and is more or less identical with the Atman or Brahman of the Upanishads. When Tantric ideas developed, each Buddha or Bodhisatva was invested with one or more Saktis or goddesses as companions and some of these female deities like Tara had independent cults of their own.

The foundation of Mahayana metaphysics is traced to Nagarjuna, a brilliant intellectual who lived shortly after Asvaghosha. He was the author of the Madhyamika school, (also known as Sunyavada) of Buddhist philosophy, which taught that reality was Sunya or the Void. We need not here go into the details of this dry metaphysics but may give some thought to Buddhist cosmologic conceptions which had a good deal of influence on art and popular religion in India and all Buddhistic countries.

## BUDDHIST COSMOLOGY

The Buddhists conceive the universe as a world system called the Chakravala divided into three main planes: 1) Hells, 2) Middle Regions and, 3) Heavens. These are built below, around and above a mythical mountain called Meru. Rebirth is possible in any of these planes in one of the Gatis or courses of life. The Gatis are: 1) Hell-dwellers, 2) Pretas or ghost-like beings 'ever consumed with hunger and thirst': 3) Asuras or demons; 4) Animals, birds, insects etc. 5) Humans, and 6) Celestials. Of these, men and celestials constitute the desirable forms of Gatis while others are considered undesirable in varying degrees. According to Buddhist conceptions, trees and plants are incapable of rebirth.

The hells, 136 in number, are situated under the base of Meru. Each hell is reserved for a particular type of sinner, and the worst, known as Avichi, is the lowest into which is cast the reviler of the Buddha and the Law. Devadatta, as stated elsewhere, is said to be now in this hell expiating his cardinal sin. The Buddhist hells are, however, purgatories where the wicked are purified in fire and torture, after which they are reborn in some other plane. The shortest duration of hell life is five hundred hell years each day of which is equivalent to fifty earth years.

The Middle Region is built round Meru and consists of four worlds inhabited by animals, ghosts, demons and men. Though in many respects inferior to the heavens, the Middle Region is important as Nirvana is only possible through human birth here.

Above the four worlds of the Middle Region rises the first heaven known as the Heaven of the Four Kings. These Four Kings are the guardians of the universe and each guards one of the cardinal points. Above the Heaven of the Four Kings is the Trayatimsa Heaven (of thirty three divinities). This heaven is presided over by Indra or Sakra (Pali, Saka) and the main occupants are considered thirty three divinities. Gautama Buddha is said to have ascended to this heaven and preached the law to the thirty three divinities and come back to the earth by means of three miraculous ladders accompanied by celestial hosts, a favourite theme in Buddhist art.

These two lowest heavens, namely the Heaven of the Four Kings and the Trayatimsa, are built round the top of Meru the apex of which supports the Trayatimsa. Twenty four heavens now rise on top of Meru above the Trayatimsa; these light regions require nothing for support but more or less, float in space. Of the twenty-four, the lowest is inhabited by celestials known as Yamas, while the famous Tusita heaven, where Gautama Buddha resided prior to his descent to earth and Maitreya now bides his time, is the next. The third of floating heavens is inhabited by celestials known as Nirmana Rati Devas or "beings who constantly enjoy pleasures provided by others".

The sixth heaven (fourth among the floating heavens) is the abode of Mara, the infamous tempter of the Buddha. It is interesting to observe that Mara, the god of pleasure described as an enemy of the Buddha, is a celestial with a heaven of his own, and in Tibetan Lamaism he is even assiduously worshipped by the faithful.

All the worlds situated under the Heaven of Mara are regions of sensuous delights where pain and pleasure are felt. While hell regions abound in sorrow, torture and suffering, the celestial regions provide delights of the senses, song and dance, and the company of fair women. But above Mara's Paradise are twenty heavens known as Dhyana Lokas ( worlds of abstraction ) and Arupa Lokas ( formless worlds ) where pain and pleasure are unknown. We need not go into the details of these mystic worlds and the nature of souls inhabiting them, but suffice to say that these heavens are reserved for beings of a high order like Arhats, Pratyeka Buddhas ( individual Buddhas as separate from universal Buddhas or world teachers ) and Bodhisatvas.

This, however, does not cover all the worlds and gods of Buddhism; for in each country favourite deities and ideas of Paradises presided over by them developed as fancy prompted, and many indigenous spirits and godlings were allotted niches in the regular pantheon. It is outside the scope of this book to go into the details of these Paradises, but suffice to say that the ordinary Buddhist, whether monk or layman, was in no great hurry to obtain Nirvana; he was a man of limited ambition and all that he desired was rebirth in one of these delightful Paradises.

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A distinctive feature of the Mahayana is its marked partiality to Sanskrit. The tendency was noticed in the Fourth Council, and later a full-fledged Sanskrit Canon was developed which differed considerably from the Pali Canon. The range of the Canon was towards the north, to Central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea and Mongolia while the south, notably Ceylon, stuck to the Pali Canon



which later spread to Burma, Siam and Cambodia. On account of this the Mahayana is also known as the Northern School while the Hinayana is called the Southern School. In the early centuries of the Christian era and even during the time of Huiyen Tsang both the Vehicles flourished side by side in Central Asia and India, but later loyalty to Canons brought about a permanent geographical distribution of the Vehicles.

There has, however, never been in the history of Buddhism any marked ill feeling between the two sects. The Mahayana accepts the validity and authority of the Pali Canon; they state that both Hinayana and Mahayana are Vehicles that take you to the same destination, but theirs, being larger, is the more comfortable for travel. The Hinayana tendency, however, is to say nothing about the Mahayana but to ignore it.

Though at present the tendency is to speak of Buddhism as consisting of the two Vehicles, in Indian and Chinese literature we come across passages that deal with three Vehicles, namely, Sarvakayana or Vehicle of the ordinary monk who wishes to become an Arhat, Pratyekabuddhayana or Vehicle of those rare beings who wish to become Pratyeka-Buddhas (individual Buddhas) but do not wish to become world teachers, and the Mahayana or Great Vehicle of Buddhas and Bodhisatvas. The first two schools later got identified with the Hinayana or Thera Vada.



## CHAPTER VIII

### BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

FROM Mohan-jo-daro to Mauryan India is a far cry. We have seen that the Mohan-jo-daro people had a well developed art and knew how to build, in bricks, houses of considerable size, and to plan and lay out cities. After the Mohan-jo-daro and Harappa finds, we have not so far been able to discover any important architectural or art remains in India till we come to the Mauryan period. This means a gap of about 3,000 years during which period the arts seem to have slept in India.

The Indo-Aryans who had settled down in the Panjab had not yet completely given up their nomad habits, and did not care to build great cities or towns. It would appear the art of building in bricks or stone was unknown to them. What habitations and altars they built were of wood. It is not clear whether or not they had images of their gods. If they had, the icons were of wood; anyway, none of the buildings or images of pre-Buddhist India has come down to us, and Indo-Aryan art and architecture may be said to have started with the Buddhists.

#### BUDDHIST ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Buddhism introduced in its worship an element hitherto unknown to Indo-Aryans. For though practically all Buddhist beliefs have their parallels in Brahminism, relic worship is peculiar to Buddhism and seems to have started with the death of the Buddha. The Buddha, in his life time, appeared to his contemporaries more than human, though he himself laid no claim to divinity; the

loss of so great a teacher and guide was unbearable to most of his followers, especially to the lay disciples who had not severed all personal attachments, and they wished to enshrine some relic of the Master as a refresher to memory.

After the Buddha's cremation, the ashes and unburnt bones, it is said, were divided among the eight major clans of East India. The clans wished to enshrine the relics of the Blessed One in durable structures so that they could serve as a sort of standing reminder to posterity. Hence for the first time in Indo-Aryan history, the convention of building in wood was given up for more permanent material, and the relics of the Buddha were encased in stone or metal caskets, and brick tumuli were built over them. This was the origin of the stupa, which was later to supply a design for both Buddhist and Hindu religious architecture.

While Buddhism remained confined to the little clans, these stupas were insignificant mounds where people collected and gossiped, and some elder regaled the curious with the tales of the Buddha and the great deeds done by him. There were possibly stupas built over the relics of important personages other than the Buddha, but all these stupas were modest structures, neither imposing nor very attractive. It was with the rise of the Mauryan empire and the zeal evinced by Asoka that the number, importance and appearance of Buddhist shrines improved.

The building in bricks was, in the beginning, confined to religious shrines; as far as secular structures were concerned the ancient convention of building in wood continued. Even the great palace of Chandragupta Maurya was mainly built of wood, and bricks were used

only for the basement. But the extensive building programmes of Asoka brought about a change in favour of bricks and stone. The existing stupas, the emperor considered, as mean and insignificant in appearance, incompatible with the fast rising importance of Buddhism, and he enclosed the original stupas in bigger ones, built railings and walls around them and embellished the structures with carvings of scenes from the Buddha's life or the Jataka Tales. In course of time the stupa became in addition to a link with the past, an object of worship; the circambulation of the stupa was the main item of worship and Pradikshana Pathas or circambulatory passages with protective railings on which artists lavished their skill became a common feature of the more important of the stupas. Further, some of the stupas, especially those enshrining the relics of the Buddha or some important disciple, attracted pilgrims from all over the country, as the stories of miracles worked by the relics spread far and wide, and became centres of great monastic establishments which housed hundreds of monks.

The Asoka Pillars show considerable skill in chiselling, polishing and inscribing stone, while the capitals of animal figures, wheels etc. that adorn these pillars testify to the skill of the sculptor. In Mauryan art generally Persian influence is more marked than the Greek. Though there were Greek settlements in the Panjab and other regions of the Mauryan empire, Asoka probably considered Persian art superior to the Greek; Alexander, it may be recalled, was generally charmed by Persian culture and wished to settle down in Persia, and the Greeks in the East possibly followed in his footsteps, at least, for some time after his death.

A beautiful shrine that has come down to us from Asoka's time, almost intact and in excellent state of preservation, is the stupa at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh. The building of this stupa is attributed to Mahendra; on his way to Ceylon, the missionary, it would appear, tarried for some time in Vedisagiri, from where his mother hailed, and it was in her honour that the stupa was built. While the stupa itself may be of the Asokan time, the four gateways, with their exuberant styles in art belong to later periods, possibly to the times of the Andhras who were great patrons of art.

Other stupas of the periods closely following but now in ruins were those of Barhut and Amaravati. The art of these stupas shows a breaking away from the Persian influence which was a characteristic of Mauryan art, and the development of a purely Indian school. This form of art, especially of Amaravati, was later to develop into the school of Ajanta and of South India generally, and supply forms to Ceylon, Java and Cambodia.

While the south was thus building up an art of its own, the Kushans and those who came in their wake were actively patronising an Indo-Greek school of art known as the Gandhara school because Gandhara region was its centre. It was the predominant school of Kanishka's empire and has left its remains from the Panjab to Central Asia, and later spread even to Tun Huang and to North and West China. This Gandharan art, Greek in form and Indian in spirit, aimed at achieving the Hellenist ideal of beauty of physical form with the Indian ideal of spiritual strength. But critics are of opinion that the combination has not always been a happy one, especially those critics who consider that beauty of form is only possible through physical ugliness.

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Farther down in the Doab, another school of art was developing which had liberated itself from Persian and Greek influences, and was feeling its way to an independent Indian tradition. The early works of this Mathura school, as it is called, are marked by sensuousness of form and theme, considerable spontaneity, and an anxiety to copy nature rather than to idealize. Those heavy female figures and massive Buddha statues, and sculptures of drinking men and drunken women, which the reader may have seen as representations of the Mathura branch of Kushan art of the first century, belong to the primitive phase of a purely Indian school which was later to flower forth into the classical art of India under the Imperial Guptas.

Along with art, the Buddhists were also developing architecture. The stupa was a sealed mound with no inlet, and was purely an object of circambulation and adoration. The pilgrims usually walked round it and after the pious exercises took rest in temporary sheds where some monk, conversant with ancient lore, told them wonderful tales of the Buddha and the saints; the monastic community that looked after the stupa and collected the revenue of alms from the pilgrims lived in wooden structures built near the stupa.

In course of time the design and significance of stupas changed. While in ancient days the stupa was merely a structure for enshrining a reliquary, with the development of Mahayana Buddhism the stupa gained a mystic importance and was considered a representation of the cosmos. The stupa developed an independent cult of its own; there was no need of any relics to make it holy. It was now thought desirable to have structures to protect

the stupa from sun and rain; this was found difficult in the case of stupas of the size of those at Sanchi, but later construction of stupas shows a tendency to make it the centre of a monastic establishment and symbolically the centre of the universe and protect it on all sides by structures.

Building in stone, though at present very common, was, in early times, a highly skilled affair involving a sound knowledge of geometry and the use of mortar, and in structures of considerable height inadequate knowledge of balance and stability often led to the collapse of the whole structure. So, when it was decided to have religious shrines built in stone for durability, what early workmen in India did was to resort to the simple method of hewing out of living rocks, stupas and circambulatory passages, cells for the monks, and halls of considerable size with pillars to support the rocky roof on top. These cave temples of early Buddhists are the oldest shrines in India now extant. Though the labour needed was prodigious for hollowing into rocks, the skill was not equally taxing, and the danger of collapse due to inadequate knowledge of construction was practically nil. We have these cave temples in several parts of India and the earliest so far discovered are those of Karli and Kanheri near Bombay, and Ajanta in Andhra. These caves were first excavated in the second century B. C. and grew with the growth of the monastic communities that lived in them. Ajanta flourished, for instance, till the seventh century A. D. while Karli and Kanheri seem to have been deserted earlier. The Karli cave is particularly important and is the biggest single cave shrine in India. At the entrance are two majestic pillars, each fifty feet in height. The main hall of the cave is 124 ft. by 47 ft. and 45 ft. in height.

Besides this there are a stupa, passages and corridors, and cells for the monks to live.

#### HINDU ART AND TEMPLES

Even after structures in stone began to be built, rock cut architecture was not neglected. If anything the art flourished and was copied by the Hindus too, the Shaiva temple in the island of Elephanta being a remarkable example. The best achievement of this type of carftsman-ship was at Elora, where temples were fashioned out of living rocks into the shape and design of regular structural shrines; to all outward appearance the Elora temples, about sixteen in number, look like regular buildings in stone, though in reality they are sculpture on a stupendous scale, the temples being carved out of a rocky hillock. The work on these temples was completed in the eighth century A. D.

Buddhism died out in India, and barring the deserted and ruined stupas and caves, we have no structural shrines of this religion now extant in India. Brahminism appropriated for itself the shrines and property of many a Buddhist establishment, and some of the living shrines of Hinduism today had a Buddhist origin; the temple of Jagannath at Puri, it seems, was a flourishing Bud-dhist shrine converted for Brahminic worship during the decadence of Buddhism. The temple at Gaya has retained its Buddhist character but even here, Brahminism exerted its influence and took over its management.

The stupa with slight variation became the design for Hindu temples too. The most important part of a Hindu temple is the sanctuary called Vimana, and the idol is installed in a cella known as Garbha Graha or the womb,



inside the Vimana. The upper part of the sanctuary rises into a pyramid or tapering tower or cone called the Sikhara. The idol usually faces east and is seen by the worshippers through a doorway this side. The main item of worship is bowing before the idol, and for the congregation there is a Mandapa or hall in front; in some shrines circambulation of Vimana forms part of worship and a Pradikshana Patha or processional passage is built round the Vimana. These essential features of the structural temples of the Hindus vary according to the size and site of the temple, but all the better classes of temples are constructed on this plan.

We have now no Hindu temple extant of the antiquity of the stupa of Sanchi or the Karli cave. The Buddhists were the pioneers in India of art and architecture and Jains and Hindus generally followed their example. There were, however, great Hindu temples of considerable antiquity in India like the shrine of Somnath in Gujerat; Huien Tsang mentions a great Hindu temple that was flourishing in his time in Multan. But most of these ancient temples were destroyed during the time of Muslim conquest, as the early Muslim zealots generally considered the destruction of the shrines of infidels as part of their religious duty and North India which bore the brunt of the first Muslim onslaught suffered heavily in this respect. In fact the Orissan temples, the Khajuraho group and other medieval Hindu temples of the north now extant, generally belong to periods posterior to the tenth century, after an abatement of the early iconoclastic zeal of the invaders.

In the south, however, Hinduism and its shrines enjoyed comparative peace. But the earliest buildings of the south were in wood and no temple of antiquity has

survived to this day, the earliest shrines in the south being the Pallava temples of Mamallapuram pertaining to the seventh century A. D. when rock cut stone structures copied wooden styles. From now on building in stone and brick started in the south and the Dravidian temples with their exuberance in art often formed the model for the great temples and shrines of South East Asia, especially of the Khmers of Cambodia.

It is remarkable that while we have a great many religious shrines in India, in varying states of preservation, from the third century B. C. onwards, not one secular building of any considerable size has come down to us even from the medieval times. It would appear there was a convention in India, among the Buddhists, Hindus and Jains that only religious structures were to be built in stone. Even great emperors like Samudragupta who flourished in the heyday of Indian art and architecture were content to live in wooden buildings. India lived mainly for her gods; this was particularly the case in the middle ages when the wealth of the nation was concentrated in the temples to such an extent that Mahmud of Ghazni who invaded India seventeen times in the eleventh century was more attracted by the gold and precious stones in the temples than in the palaces of the kings of India.



## CHAPTER IX

### EXTENT OF INDIAN CULTURAL EXPANSION AS SEEN BY FA HIEN

FROM the time of Asoka Buddhism had been steadily spreading into Persia and Central Asia and during the reign of Kanishka, it became the most important religion in Central Asia. The fame of the Buddha as a world teacher, as a teacher whose law recognized no geographical or racial barriers but was intended for humanity as a whole, had reached China before the first century of the Christian era but because of the difficulties of communication and her own internal troubles, China could not establish contact with India. With the coming into power of the Hans who wished to cultivate diplomatic relations with the outside world, contact with India was established by Ming Ti, the Han Emperor. \*

From now on there was a regular flow of missionaries and scholars from Central Asia and India into China. Many Buddhist works were translated into Chinese and circulated among the *literati* of China; this together with the exemplary lives of the missionaries evoked considerable interest in Buddhism in China, and many great and learned men in China became Buddhists and wished to learn Buddhism at first hand in India, and see the places hallowed by the footsteps of the Buddha. The religious fervour thus created in China led to regular pilgrimages to India, and the first of these Chinese pilgrims into India who has left us an important account of what he saw was Fa Hien.

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\* For details of the Chinese mission, see chapter xx

Fa Hien was not a very versatile or observant pilgrim like the celebrated Huiyen Tsang who visited India later. He was a devout monk, not much interested in anything but the greatness of his own Mahayana sect of Buddhism and did not care to court the favours of kings or nobles. He was something of a Mahayana propagandist who wrote for the benefit of the incredulous Chinese who were inclined to doubt the tall tales of miracles that were gaining currency in China about the Buddha. So his accounts generally deals with the great things that were happening in Buddhahland, with miracles wrought in places hallowed by the footsteps of the Master or where he had shed his blood for saving living creatures in previous births. Besides, the relics of the Buddha were still in India and neighbouring countries, and their fame for working miracles was widespread and Fa Hien wished to bear witness to this too. Add to this, the pilgrim's natural love of the miraculous and we get some idea of his accounts of the pilgrimage. Fa Hien never thought that men in Buddhahland, fifteen centuries after his death, would be critically studying his accounts in order to get some data in a badly documented period in Indian history; otherwise, he would have probably left a different account of his travels.

#### CENTRAL ASIA

Anyway, in spite of its wild exaggerations and monkish leanings Fa Hien's account gives us a fairly sound picture of the range of Indian culture in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era. The pilgrim started on his eventful journey in the year 399 A. D. from Ch'ang-an, the then capital of China, with four other monks as his companions. On the borders of China they were joined

by another party of Chinese monks who had started independently on a similar pilgrimage, and all travelled together and reached Tun Huang. This oasis was to rise later as a great centre of Buddhist art and learning and was to house one of the greatest polyglot libraries in the world, but in Fa Hien's time it had not reached this religious importance; but as the gateway to China it was a busy mercantile centre and a meeting place of all the trading nationals of Asia who went to and from China. The pilgrims were amply supplied with funds by the Governor of Tun Huang for their onward journey.

Travelling seventeen days to the west, the party reached a place called Shan Shan, an independent city state. The chief was a Buddhist and the population generally followed the Hinayana persuasion or the Lesser Vehicle. There were, in all, some four thousand monks in the city's monastic establishments.

Fa Hien and some of the monks then travelled in a northwesterly direction and reached Karashahr. The citizens were Buddhists of a sort but Fa Hien was not impressed by them. Their rites were different from those practised in China and elsewhere; they were woefully lacking in elementary courtesy and were not acquainted with the rules of politeness and hospitality. The pilgrims did not wish to stay long among such rude people, and left the city abruptly. They were probably newly converted barbarians who were not quite conversant with the doctrines and practices of mature Buddhism. Anyway Karashahr marks the northernmost limit of Indian cultural expansion in Fa Hien's time.

The pilgrims then descended southwards, and travelling for about 35 days through uninhabited and

inhospitable regions, reached Khotan, the greatest city of Central Asia at the time, founded by Indians during Asoka's reign.

In Khotan Fa Hien found himself completely at home. The prevailing religion was Mahayana which was in a flourishing state in the city. Fa Hien has left us a very pleasing account of Khotan. "This country is prosperous and happy. Its people are well-to-do; they have all received the faith and find their amusement in religious music. The monks number several tens of thousands, most of them belonging to the Greater Vehicle. They all obtain their food from a common stock. The people live scattered about; and in front of the door of every house they build small pagodas the smallest of which is about 20 ft. in height. They prepare rooms for travelling monks and place them at the disposal of monks who are their guests, together with anything else they may want."

The ruler of Khotan was an ardent Buddhist; he welcomed the pilgrims and lodged them in a monastery called Gomati which enjoyed royal patronage. While other monks travelled onward after a few days' stay, Fa Hien stayed in Khotan in order to witness a religious festival that was falling due in three months' time. He has left us a description of the festival which is strangely similar to the age old religious festivals of India. "Beginning on the first day of the fourth moon, the main thoroughfares inside the city are swept and watered, and the side streets are decorated. Over the city gate they stretch a large awning with all kinds of ornamentation under which the king and queen and court ladies take their place. The monks of the Gomati monastery take the first place in the procession. At a distance of three or four *Li* (a *Li* is about

a third of a mile) from the city, a four wheeled image car is made; over thirty feet in height, looking like a movable 'Hall of the Buddha', and adorned with seven precious things, with streaming pennants and embroidered canopies. The image of the Buddha is placed in the middle of the car with two attendant Bodhisattvas and Devas following behind. These are all beautifully carved in gold and silver and are suspended in the air. When the images are one hundred paces from the city gate, the king takes off his cap of state and puts on new clothes; walking barefoot and holding flowers and incense in his hands with attendants on each side, he proceeds out of the gate. On meeting the images, he bows his head down to the ground, scatters the flowers and burns the incense. When the images enter the city, the queen and court ladies who are on the top of the gate scatter far and wide all kinds of flowers which flutter down and thus the splendour of decoration is offered up complete. The cars are all different; each monastery has a day for its own procession, beginning on the first of the fourth moon and lasting until the fourteenth when the processions end and the king and queen go back to the palace."

This indeed is part of India and her immemorial car festivals.

Khotan was, in Fa Hien's time, a very important centre of Buddhism and the pilgrim speaks of a famous monastery, situated eight *Li* to the west of the city, called the King's New Monastery which was eighty years in building and completed in the reign of three kings. It was a splendid building, about 250 ft. in height, and was a centre of pilgrimage not only for Khotanese but for kings and nobles and common folk from neighbouring kingdoms too.

From Khotan the pilgrim travelled twenty five days and reached Kashghar, visiting Karghalik and Tash Kurghan *en route*, both Buddhist cities. In Kashghar the king was holding a Pancha Parishad or quinquennial assembly, and the pilgrim took part in it. Though the number of monks in Kashghar were only about a thousand, all following the Lesser Vehicle, the country was rich in relics; for it had a spittoon the Buddha had used, which was of stone and of the colour of the almsbowl of the Buddha; there was also a tooth of the Buddha which was enshrined in a pagoda.

#### INDIA

Fa Hien now descended down Udayana (Afghanistan), which was a Buddhist country, into India. On entering India Fa Hien made some enquires to find out when actually Buddhist missionaries first went to China from India, and according to the information he collected, Buddhism started on its far eastern journey some three hundred years after the Nirvana of Sakyamuni.

Fa Hien noticed that the Guptan language and culture, which he calls the language of the Middle Country, was well-known in the North West too. In India, the pilgrim was in his element; he has left us fabulous accounts of the places made holy by incidents in the life of Gautama Buddha and in his previous lives as Bodhisatva. In Peshawar the famous stupa erected by Kanishka was still existing and Fa Hien gazed on it in wonderment. The almsbowl of the Buddha was in this shrine, and Fa Hien says it daily worked miracles when taken out for public worship. "It holds perhaps over two pecks and is of several colours, chiefly black. The four joinings are clearly distinguishable.



It is about one-fifth of an inch thick, of transparent brilliancy and of a glossy lustre. Poor people throw in a few flowers, and it is full; very rich people wishing to make offering of a large quantity of flowers, may throw in a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand bushels without ever filling it." In Peshawar one of the companions of Fa Hien died, and the rest went in different directions, and Fa Hien continued his journey alone.

Travelling over the North-Western regions and the Panjab and visiting many shrines, the pilgrim came to the Middle Country or Guptan empire (for the rise of this empire, see next chapter). Of the rulers of this country, Fa Hien merely states that they followed the Brahminic religion. Anyway he noticed the state of prosperity in the kingdom; the caste system was in full swing. "The people of the Middle Country are prosperous and happy, without registration or official restrictions. Only those who till the king's land have to pay taxes, so much on the profits they make. Those who want to go away, may go; those who want to stop may stay on. The king in his administration uses no corporal punishments; criminals are generally fined according to the gravity of their offences..... Throughout the country no one kills any living thing, nor drinks wine, nor eats onions or garlic. But Chandalas are segregated; Chandalas is their name for foul men and they live away from other people, and when they approach a city or market, they beat a piece of wood in order to distinguish themselves. Then people know who they are and avoid coming into contact with them."

Fa Hien, as a rule, was interested only in Buddhism and from his accounts it would appear that the Guptas, though Hindus, patronised Buddhism too, though Brahmins

are at times mentioned as being jealous of the power of the Buddhist Sangha. He found ninety six heretical schools flourishing in the Gangetic plain; these must have been different schools of philosophy, for which India had never had any dearth, and the main heresy of these sects was that they considered life as real and not illusory. They might not have been all thorough-going materialists, but we know for certain that in Guptan India people took the pleasures of life seriously and were not particularly fascinated by the lure of Nirvana. Fa Hien also found here an order of ascetics who traced their origin to Devadatta, and they worshipped, it would appear, three Buddhas preceding Gautama but not this personage.

The pilgrim visited Magadha and Pataliputra and in this city the legends connected with Asoka and his house were still current. The story of the destruction of the Bo-tree by the jealous wife of Asoka is narrated. He also speaks of free hospitals, probably existing from Asoka's time and continued under the Guptas. To these hospitals "come poor or helpless patients, orphans, widows and cripples. They are well taken care of; a doctor attends them, food and medicine are supplied according to their needs. They are all made quite comfortable and when they are cured they go away."

Fa Hien did not visit Ujjain, the capital of Vikramaditya who was then ruling the Guptan empire. Nor did he visit the Deccan; in this place, however, he mentions there was a wonderful cave monastery and the reference was probably to Ajanta. Nalanda, the great medieval monastery of international fame, had not come into prominence in Fa Hien's time; the main centre of Buddhist learning at the period, it would appear, was Tamralipti, the great Magadhan port. There were twenty four monasteries in

this city, and Fa Hien stayed here for two years studying Sanskrit and Pali, copying scriptures and drawing pictures of icons. Then he left for Ceylon with his books taking ship at the port.

#### CEYLON AND THE RETURN VOYAGE

After a voyage of fourteen days Fa Hien reached Ceylon. He found the island completely Buddhist. The tradition of a visit by the Buddha was prevalent among the Sinhalese, and a tooth of the Buddha, then as now, was a cherished possession of the island. There was an annual festival of the tooth when it was taken out in a grand procession throughout the principal streets of the city; it was then exhibited for public worship for ninety days after which it was taken back to its shrine.

The almsbowl of the Buddha was another important relic which was held in great honour in the Buddhist world. By Fa Hien's time a story had got wide publicity that the bowl had obtained self-moving properties and was capable of transporting itself at will from any country where the Law tended to decline and moving to more congenial regions. Fa Hien, as we have noticed, saw the bowl at Peshawar in Kanishka's stupa. In Ceylon he heard a sermon preached by a visiting Indian monk to the effect that the bowl would travel in the course of centuries to all the Buddhist countries in the world; that from Peshawar it would descend to the Panjab and thence travel to Khotan and Karashahr in Central Asia from where it would move to China and Ceylon and finally back to India. The travel-worn bowl would then ascend to the Tusita Heaven where Maitryea now resides. The Buddhist world believes that this prophesy has been fulfilled and Maitreya will bring

the bowl with him to earth when he gets born as the successor of Gautama Buddha.

The legend recorded by Fa Hien is interesting not because of its truth, but because of its indication of the extent of Buddhist influence in his time; China, Central Asia and Ceylon had come under the international ambit of Buddhism. Korea and Japan were outside it; so were Tibet and Mongolia. The countries of South East Asia, even Burma, were not sufficiently advanced in Buddhism to deserve a visit by the moving bowl.

Fa Hien spent two years in Ceylon from where he was able to obtain important collections of books. Homesickness now seized the pilgrim. He had been away from his native land for many years, had travelled in strange lands, lived with strange peoples and eaten strange food all through the eventful journey. The mountains, the rivers, the landscape, the birds and animals, the fruits and vegetables, says the pilgrim, were unlike those of his native land. Besides, all his travel companions were now separated from him. Some had died on the way, others stayed in India in order to live in greater intimacy with Buddhist tradition. The pilgrim felt lonely and wished to return and see once again his beloved native land; and when a Chinese merchant in Ceylon presented him with a white silk fan of Chinese make, Fa Hien wept.

The pilgrim decided to return to China by sea, and took passage on board a merchant vessel. His return journey is of interest to us, as it shows the extent and mode of Indian shipping in the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era.

From Fa Hien's accounts we do not get any idea of the commerce between India and Burma or the countries

of Indo China, but sailing from the ports of South India and Ceylon to the islands of Java and Sumatra was regular. Further, Indian ships also sailed between these islands and the ports of China. As such it would be interesting to follow Fa Hien's accounts of his return journey from Ceylon to China.

The vessel in which Fa Hien travelled was a fairly large ship with more than two hundred persons on board including the crew who were all Indians; astern of the ship was a small vessel in tow to serve as a life boat in case of accident and destruction of the ship. Catching a fair wind, the ship sailed eastward from Ceylon for two days when it encountered a violent gale and sprang a leak. Panic now seized the passengers who were mostly traders travelling to Java and Sumatra, and they made an attempt to board the boat in tow, but the sailors manning this, fearing this would sink the boat, cut the ropes and released the tow boat. All heavy cargo was now thrown overboard, and Fa Hien's collection of scriptures, which was classified as heavy cargo, was only saved through prayers to the Captain of the ship and the Bodhisatva Kuan Yin. The pilgrim, however, took his pitcher and ewer and whatever else he could lay hold on and threw these into the sea. The gale blew continuously for thirteen days and nights, and the crew managed to keep the ship afloat during these anxious days, after which they sighted an island (probably Nicobars) where they cast anchor and stopped the leak in the ship. The ship then continued its journey.

The voyage from Ceylon to Java was obviously the first ocean travel of Fa Hien, apart from the coastal sailing from Tamralipti to Ceylon, and the pilgrim was struck by the majesty of the ocean and its dangers. "The expanse

of the ocean," says he, "is boundless, east and west are not distinguishable; only by the observation of the sun, moon and the constellations is progress to be made. In cloudy and rainy weather our vessel drifted at the mercy of wind, without keeping any definite course. In the darkness of night nothing was to be seen but the great waves beating upon one another and flashing forth light like fire, huge turtles, sea lizards, and such like monsters of the deep. Then the merchants lost heart, not knowing whither they were going, and the sea being very deep, without bottom, they had no place where they could cast their stone anchor and stop. When the sky cleared, they were able to tell east from west, and again proceed on their proper course; but had they struck a hidden rock, there would have been no way of escape." A rough sea was bad enough, but the pirates who infested the Indian Ocean at the time were even worse, to meet whom, Fa Hien says, was certain death.

After having been in the sea for ninety days, the ship carrying Fa Hien reached its destination Java (from the Chinese name of the island it cannot be said whether it was Java or Sumatra). Here Fa Hien found Brahminism flourishing. Buddhism was, no doubt, known especially as Ceylon was Buddhist and sailing between Ceylon and Java was regular, but it had not made much headway. The fountain head of Indian cultural inflow into Java and Sumatra was South India, and this region had not yet become a stronghold of Buddhism. Both Java and Sumatra were later to come under Buddhist influence and the former was to give the world at Borobodour one of the greatest monuments of Buddhism.

Fa Hien spent five months in the island, and then took passage on a vessel bound for China. This ship too, like the one that brought him from Ceylon, had accommodation for over two hundred persons; the crew were Indians and the ship took with it provision for fifty days which was the usual time taken for a voyage from Java to Canton. The ship steered in a north-easterly course, but after a month's fair weather, misfortune overtook this vessel too. A violent storm drove the ship off its course and the sailors did not know where they had drifted to. This time it was not Fa Hien's cargo of books that was in danger of being thrown overboard but the pilgrim himself. The sailors who had probably heard of the misfortune to the ship that brought Fa Hien from Ceylon were convinced that the pilgrim was the Jonah of the ship and the Brahmin astrologers on board confirmed this conviction. The Captain of the ship now decided to land Fa Hien in some island nearby and leave him to his fate; "for" said he, "it is not right to endanger all our lives for one man." But fortunately there was an influential passenger on board who was friendly with Fa Hien and he threatened the Captain and the crew that he would inform against them to the Chinese authorities on their reaching Canton and they all would receive their well deserved retribution if they harmed the pilgrim as Fa Hien was held in high esteem in China even by the emperor. This had the desired effect. But the crew having lost their reckoning, the ship drifted, and finally by blind sailing in a north-westerly direction the famished passengers and crew landed in north China instead of at Canton.

Thus the pilgrim reached his native land. He had started from Ch'ang-an in the year 399 and returned to China in 414 A. D. after travelling many more miles by

sea and land than any pilgrim, traveller or adventurer before his time. He now settled down to write an account of his travels and to translate the scriptures he had brought from India and Ceylon. In this prodigious work Fa Hien was ably assisted by an Indian monk by name Buddha Jiva who had gone to China as a missionary and become friendly with Fa Hien.





## CHAPTER X

### AGE OF THE GUPTAS

IN the confusion and constant wars that followed the fall of the Mauryan empire the country was feeling the need for reviving the ancient martial spirit of the Kshatriyas in order to build up the lost glory of India. For six hundred years now, from the death of Asoka in 232 B. C. North India has been a cockpit of races, each devouring the other only to suffer destruction and obscurity in the never ending waves of foreign invasions and internal wars. And many a patriot in India must have felt the need for the rule of a strong man of the type of Chandragupta Maurya. And one like him did appear.

On the Asokan pillar edict of Allahabad appear, below the Mauryan emperor's inscription, the eulogy of a prince who was a different type of man from the pious, peace loving humanitarian who sorrowed at the slaughter of animals. This new king was a man who revelled in war and blood; he was never struck with remorse on seeing the carnage caused in the conquest of kingdoms, but ruthlessly pressed his advantage and destroyed his enemies. "Skilled in a hundred battles, relying on the strength of his right arm, he exterminated the kings of the north and reduced to serfdom and vassalage many a king in the east and west". By him, we are told in another record, the whole race of Kshatriyas was overthrown, and he exalted the meritorious and humbled the proud..... He was not merely a warrior; for this versatile genius "put to shame Narada by his skill as a master of choirs and of musical accomplishments; and by his sharp and cultured mind overcame Kashyapa the teacher of god Indra."

This great prince was Samudra Gupta and the euology on the Asokan pillar was inscribed by his court poet Harisena by the order of his son and successor Chandra Gupta II, known in Indian legend as Vikramaditya.

Of Samudra Gupta's father, Chandra Gupta I, we know little except that he considerably improved his position by marrying a Licchavi princess named Kumara Devi. These Licchavis were the descendents of the Vaisali clan of the same name who led the Vajjan Confederacy against Ajatasatru and were defeated by him (see page 76). After eight centuries of obscurity they again appear in the history of East India. The clan must have enjoyed considerable vitality and longevity to survive the empires of the Nandas, Mauryas and Sungas and the periods of confusion in between.

Chandra Gupta ruled a small principality in Pataliputra; later inscriptions and coins would indicate that much of Chandra Gupta's power and prestige was derived from the Licchavis. Kumara Devi was probably the queen of the clan when Chandra Gupta married her in the year 320 A. D. Chandra Gupta himself was an ambitious man and extended the frontiers of his patrimony by conquest but his son Samudra Gupta was the real founder of the Gupta empire.

Samudra Gupta had no sympathy with Buddhism and its ideals of pacifism. He actively pursued a policy of aggression and aggrandisement and one after another, the kingdoms of the north fell to him. He is said to have performed the celebrated Asvamedha sacrifice of Vedic times, which had been given up for long, at least from the time of Asoka who, like a true Buddhist, had prohibited all animal sacrifices. He conquered the Pallavas

of the south who were, however, allowed to retain their independence after a show of Guptan might. The main expansion of Samudra Gupta's kingdom was towards the west where the powerful Sakas ruled many kingdoms of which the most important was Malwa with its capital at Ujjain. Samudra Gupta does not appear to have conquered Malwa, but was content with a token allegiance which permitted him to perform the Asvamedha.

Samudra Gupta's policy of expansion was followed by his son Chandra Gupta II who conquered Malwa and made Ujjain his capital. By a marriage alliance he won over the Vatakas, the successors of the Andhras in the south. After thus securing the friendship of the Vatakas and the Pallavas in the south, he was in a position to demand the allegiance of the little kingdoms of the Panjab, and the Guptan empire at the time of Chandra Gupta II extended from the Indus to the Bay of Bengal, and from Nepal to Mysore. The Guptan empire was not, however, a single unit like the Mauryan empire ruled by viceroys and governors appointed by a central authority; for in spite of the Allahabad inscription which reads like one of those Assyrian records of blood and iron, the Gupta emperors were liberal rulers who allowed conquered kings to retain their titles and a good deal of independence, and their empire was something like a commonwealth with a central kingdom and a number of semi-independent kingdoms all round who owed nominal allegiance to the emperor or were friendly with him.

Vikramaditya was an enlightened ruler and his reign ushered in an era of artistic and literary efflorescence. To his court were attached the great men of the age; Kalidasa, the poet and dramatist, Varahamihira, the

astronomer, and a number of other celebrities. The emperor's patronage extended to Buddhists too, and Vasubandhu, the great Buddhist scholar and saint, revered as a Patriarch by the Mahayana, was attached to Chandra Gupta's court.

#### GUPTAN ART

The age of the Guptas is known as the classical age of Indian art. Though no great work of architecture of the Guptan age has come down to us, the Guptan emperors were liberal patrons of art and by their time the indigenous schools of the south and the north, having passed the primitive and experimental phases, settled down to sound conventions in style and spirit. Hinduism too had developed its own themes and motifs, and regular rules of sculpture and architecture were laid down for the construction of temples and shrines, and for chiselling figures of gods, goddesses, demons and genii. In spite of the developments of these conventions Guptan art is noted for its strength as well as beauty.

A noticeable feature of Guptan art is that it flourished not only in the Middle Country, actually ruled by the emperors, but even in the adjoining dominions and we find its influences from Mathura to Elephanta, from Sarnath to Ajanta. Painting too had come into its own during this period, and in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* we read of a description of a painting. In Ajanta Guptan art is well represented in sculptures and in painting. A more detailed account of the art of this cave monastery is of particular interest to the cultural history of India as the art of Ajanta represents the traditions of India from the early centuries of the Christian era till the end of the Guptan era. The first caves were excavated sometime in the second century.

B. C. and the site was abandoned in the eighth century. Thus for about nine centuries a monastic community had lived at the site and Ajanta had grown not only with Buddhism but with the whole of India; sculptors and painters of Ajanta were interested not merely in religious art but in all phases of life and we see on the walls of the caves vigorous pictures of city and village life, of the life in the courts, of lovers, dancers and recluses, of princes and beggars, of bull fights and boating, of visits of embassies, of beasts of burden, of flowers and trees, of Bodhisatvas and flying celestials.

Ajanta has rightly been termed the cradle of Asian art. In Buddhist India, the monks were the custodians of arts and sciences, secular as well as religious. Freed from the need of working for a living and unhindered by domestic ties, the monk lived for his craft and his religion. A monastic establishment was a centre of art and learning to which scholars and artists from neighbouring regions came for instruction. Similarly the services of expert craftsmen were requisitioned by kings of neighbouring countries and distant monasteries and the art forms developed and appreciated in one region soon spread into many lands of the Buddhist world. Ajanta has inspired the painting and sculpture of several regions in India, of Bagh, Badami and Elora and had travelled far; for not only the paintings in Sigiriya in Ceylon bear unmistakable resemblance to Ajanta murals but art critics have even discovered the influence of Ajanta in the Caves of Tun Huang in China and in Horiuji in Japan.

Many of the masterpieces of Ajantan art belong to the Gupta period, and the conventions established in this age generally inspired the forms of later times, of the Orissan temples and of Pala and Sena art in Bengal, of

Khajuraho temples in Central India. Guptan art also got blended into Dravidian styles in the art of the Chalukyas, Hoysalas and Pallavas of the South.

#### SOCIETY IN GUPTAN INDIA

Of life of the people in the Guptan era too we have many a pleasing picture. Trade had developed to an unprecedented extent under Guptan patronage, and cities like Ujjain rose to much wealth and fame. The stage, dominated by Kalidasa, enjoyed the patronage of princes and the common folk. Apart from stage-shows, people had many diversions such as cock fights and quail fights, water sports, races, and literary competitions. The *Kama Sutra* of Vatsyayana, gives us a vivid picture of a highly prosperous society. The work treats mainly of Kama or the pleasures of sex which, at the time, was reckoned one of the main objects of life (itself a testimony to the interest of the age in life and its joys), but also throws interesting sidelights on the state of society at the time it was composed. The exact date of Vatsyayana is not known, but the society he depicts is typically Guptan; probably Vatsyayana lived in Samudra Gupta's time, a little before Kalidasa, another great lover of life and the greatest exponent of new born love.

It is interesting to note that the hero of Vatsyayana is not the saint or the warrior, but the Nagarika, the man-about-town, with a comfortable income and no serious commitments in life. Vatsyayana was of opinion that for the full development of personality, a man must live in a city with its many enchantments, and not in a village like a rustic, in the forests like an ascetic or in a monastery like a recluse. When the fires of passion had died down, and life was on the ebb, Vatsyayana did not mind men taking to asceticism but when a man was in the full enjoyment of vigour, youth and health, he considered it a sin for him to leave the world and its pleasures and waste his precious life in forests and monasteries.

The Nagarika was not a mere pleasure hunter. He was educated, a lover of literature and fine arts, a connoisseur of painting, of wine and women, a lover of the stage, picnics, garden parties, a familiar figure in Chitra Salas or art galleries; he kept himself in sound health by such manly exercises as riding and swimming. The heroine of this interesting work is not a chaste and loyal wife of the type of Sita but the Ganika or arch-courtesan, the *hetaera* as the Greeks used to call her. The courtesan, from time immemorial, had held a respectable place in Indian society, especially after the development of the caste system. Certain sub-castes among the Sudras had for their traditional occupation acting, dancing, singing and those arts that please men; the community was matrilineal, and the women, in addition to histrionics, practised the oldest profession. Some of these women rose to much fame and wealth; in the *Jataka Tales* we read of them as "receiving a thousand gold pieces for the night, and in the Taranga of *Katha* one of them demands five hundred elephants for a single hour. In the latter work, too, a courtesan is so rich that she can buy an army to restore a fallen king..... They were in evidence at all public festivities, in religious processions, at race meetings, cock fighting, quail fighting and ram-fighting, and were the stars of each theatrical audience. Kings showered favours upon them and took counsel with them; they come down to us as the heroines of plays and romances." In the Buddhist scriptures is narrated the story of the courtesan Ambapali who entertained the Buddha and his disciples and bestowed upon him the gift of an extensive mango grove, much to the chagrin of the Licchavi chiefs. Sudraka's *Mricchakatida* has a virtuous courtesan for heroine.

Vatsyayana's Ganika, however, was no cheap woman of the city. As a preliminary training to her profession she studied and cultivated the sixty four arts that lend charm and richness to life, which includes, besides beauty

culture, music and dancing, painting drawing and sculpture, magic, astronomy and philosophy. She had in fact all the accomplishments except the moral one. Such was the companion of the Nagarika. He took her for outdoor games and sports, paid her handsomely, and Nagarikas often vied with one another in displaying their mistresses in public dressed in superlative finery. What, it may well be asked, was the position of the Nagarika's wife ?

The wife was bond and domestic and cultivated the virtues of loyalty and devotion to her husband. While the Nagarika entertained his mistresses and friends in the portico, his wife supervised the arrangements in the kitchen for supplying the party food and drinks, It was bad form for the wife to come into the portico, and for the courtesan to enter the harem. Here the wife ruled, and she had the right of ordering out a courtesan who ventured into the sacred precincts of the household; and as long as the Nagarika respected this sentiment, a good wife did not mind what he did outside. A man, after all, is a man and he must have his diversions.

These ancient conventions may appear strange to us, moderns. But women are capable of great adjustments as people who practise polygamy and concubinage know. Anyway, Sati does not seem to have been widely prevalent in the Guptan era.

Fa Hien's account would indicate that the ideal of non-killing preached and practised by the Buddhists all over the country had its effect. Though Samudra Gupta is said to have performed the Asvamedha, sacrifices had fallen into disrepute and were practised only by the lower classes and in secret cults, and by kings who claimed world dominion. The Brahmins had taken to vegetarianism like the generality of the Buddhist monks, and butchers were drawn from the Chandalas or lowest classes; while there was drinking, drunkenness was uncommon. The Brahmins, as the priestly class, wished to



appear as respectable and abstemious as the Buddhist monks, and abstained from intoxicating drinks. The old Vedic ritual was falling into disuse, and the Puranic gods (see next chapter) were rising in place of the ancient bright deities of Indo-Aryans.

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Of the relations of the Guptans with the outside world, we know little. Under Samudra Gupta and Vikramaditya, overseas trade must have flourished as the general prosperity of the empire suggests, but of its extent and volume we have no authentic account. It is surmised by historians that Samudra Gupta's conquest of the Pallavas drove many of them to seek new lands across the seas in South East Asia, but we have no record of this either.

Anyway, the *Culavamsa* of Ceylon mentions that king Meghavarman of Ceylon, a contemporary of Samudra Gupta, obtained permission from the Indian king to build a monastery at Nalanda. This was probably the beginning of the great university of Nalanda. Guptan art influences, and Buddhist and Brahmanic icons of Guptan style have been discovered in Burma, Indo China and even Borneo; there are art critics who trace the great art of Borobodour as a colonial form of Guptan art. There was cultural flow from India to South East Asia during the Guptan period too, but little of political contacts or diplomatic missions. In this respect the Gupta emperors were far behind the Mauryans and the Kushans; probably their patronage and profession of Brahminism were responsible for this.

Vikramaditya was succeeded by his son Kumara Gupta I who performed the Asvamedha sacrifice. His justification for this is not clear. At best he could have only kept his father's conquests intact; Kumara Gupta died in the year 454 and the closing years of his reign were marked by the outburst into India of the wild hordes known as the Huns, a branch of the Turko-Mongloid nomads whose

activities extended from Eastern Europe to China. Kumara Gupta tried his best to stem the tide but died fighting these hordes, and his son, the brave Skanda Gupta, succeeded in checking their advance. But on Skanda Gupta's death in 455, resistance against the Huns collapsed and northern India lay a prey to them as when the Sakas burst into the country after the collapse of the Mauryan empire. The boundary of the Guptan empire steadily receded before Hun onslaught till it completely vanished by about 550 A.D.

Unlike the Sakas, the Huns lost their individuality and their empire as suddenly as they built these up. By the beginning of the sixth century, however, the Hun empire, under Toramana and his son Mihirakula extended from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. The wickedness of Mihirakula is a favourite theme of Buddhist literature. One of his pastimes, it would appear, was watching elephants being thrown down Himalayan precipices, and another the burning of Buddhist monasteries and monuments. He is reputed to have been an ardent worshipper of Shiva, and a friend of Brahmins but an implacable enemy of the Buddhists. Mihirakula was defeated by a coalition of Narasimha Gupta, the king of the vanishing empire who was also known by the name of Baladitya, and Yasodharman of Mandasor in Western India, but the terrible memory of Mihirakula's cruelty was kept alive by the Buddhists, and Huien Tsang narrates quite a number of stories about this monstrous Hun. He is said to have killed the venerable patriarch Simha Bhikshu, the 23rd from the Buddha's time according to Chinese traditions; in the year 540, Mihirakula died and pious monks had visions of his wicked soul descending into hell.

Anyway the Guptan empire was the last of the great Hindu empires. After this many empires appeared in India, and able and energetic Hindu rulers like Harsha, but none achieved the glory of the Guptas and the Mauryas. From now on till the conquest of India by the Muslims the history of India, like that in the early centuries

of the Christian era, is something of a blank relieved only by the rule of Harsha during whose reign Huien Tsang visited India. But the age like the epoch that followed the disruption of the Mauryan empire was one of complex growth, of the conflict of Hinduism and Buddhism, of close contacts between India and the other Buddhist countries, and of a great age of pilgrimages from China to India. But before we deal with what the great pilgrims of China have recorded about India at this time we may examine the internal evidences of religious growth during the period.



## CHAPTER XI

### PURANIC AND TANTRIC HINDUISM

THE Hinduism of the Guptan emperors was not the Vedic Brahminism which we had dealt with in the second chapter but quite a different thing; it was in fact as different from Vedic religion as Mahayana was from primitive Buddhism.

At no time in the history of Buddhism in India had this religion been able to conquer the whole country and completely replace Brahminism. When Buddhism rose in East India and spread rapidly under Asoka as a popular religion, Brahminism too made an effort to win over the common people and, in this process, had to sacrifice many a cherished ideal and favourite god, and borrow much from Buddhism itself.

Brahminism did not abolish caste in order to gain popular support, as it would have meant the surrender of the privileged position of the Brahmins without which there would have been no sense in preserving Brahminism. The shrewd Brahmins must have also noticed the poor success of Buddhists in the matter of abolishing caste in India. Ideas of superiority and inferiority are deep rooted in human nature, and the Buddhists and Jains, both of whom rejected caste as a religious institution, admitted its validity as a social and occupational convenience and allowed their followers to observe caste rules in the matter of inter-dining, inter-marriage and other social intercourse; as a rule caste was given up only in monasteries, and the view that religious orders were exempt from caste was shared by Brahmins too. Anyway, the dogma of transmigration common to Brahmins, Buddhists and Jains alike, gave a rational background to caste, as birth in a high caste and the advantage it implied were reckoned as well earned by good deeds done in a past life.

Taken all these together, Brahmins did not think it necessary to abolish caste in order to popularise Hinduisim but resorted to a different method. The Indo-Aryans, as we have seen, though racial fanatics, were extremely tolerant of religious beliefs. Till the rise of Buddhism, the emphasis was on old Vedic ritual and tradition, and alien practices and gods were accepted by Brahmins only when compelled by foreign invaders or by indigenous rebels who were powerful enough to dictate terms to the Brahmins. But with the rise of Buddhism and its popularity, the need for conciliating the non-Aryan population and their gods was felt to a greater extent; by now, moreover the power of Brahmins as great wizards able to control the spirit population by powerful Vedic spells and ritual came to be recognized by the masses all of whom lived in dread of evil spirits. Hence the Brahmins who condescended to propitiate the spirits and gods of alien races only increased their power and prestige. The process went on so rapidly without any restraint that the ancient Vedic religion was transformed into something quite different; new deities rose into prominence in the Brahminic pantheon while most of the important deities of old either disappeared or were pushed into the background. Fresh revelations and scriptures glorifying the new gods came into being, and ancient ideas of gods, demons, heaven, hell and the cosmos took on new forms. Old texts were given new interpretations to fit in with novel ideas and when the doctrines were found in conflict with the texts, these were interpolated.

This process of assimilation and adjustments, this religious synthesis as the learned love to call it, gained momentum during the period of confusion that followed the fall of the Mauryan empire and the incursions of the Sakas and other nomads. And when the Guptas appeared as the champions of Hinduism in the fourth century of the Christian era, their religion had little in common with that of the Upanishads and Brahmanas except the name. We are told that Samudra Gupta and Kumara Gupta had per-

formed the Asvamedha; it is doubtful if the officiating priests had actually killed the animals and feasted on meat and Soma. We had, in later ages, and have even now, symbolic sacrifices in which certain vegetables like Kalabash are made to represent animals and cut, and it is probable that the Gupta Asvamedha was symbolic; for in addition to Fa Hien's testimony we have internal evidence to show in the law books and other literature of the Hindus that Brahmins, like Buddhist monks, were fast becoming vegetarians and abstained from meat and drink, except in secret rites, and generally revolted at the thought of killing either for meat or for sacrificial purposes, whatever the notions of the lower castes in these matters.

The new development in Hinduism was known as Puranic, because the scriptures of this complex synthesis were called Puranas, as distinct from the Vedas; these texts now receded into the background and became mainly of interest to the scholar and ritualist, though still considered revelations. But the real scriptures of popular religion were the Puranas which treated, in elaboration, of the origin and genealogies of gods and goddesses newly incorporated into Hinduism, of the heavens and other regions inhabited by their enemies, allies and themselves, and of numerous semi-mythical beings, their functions, and the method of propitiating them.

A characteristic feature of this Puranic development was image worship, the building of great shrines for gods, like those of ancient Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, and an elaborate temple ritual. Under the patronage of princes some of the temples became exceedingly wealthy and the feasts and festivals of the idols were celebrated in right royal style attracting pilgrims from all over the country. These temples and their trustees had in their service armies of attendants and guards, actors, bevy of dancing girls, elephants and horses, and the festival in a temple was always an occasion for expression of popular

emotion, and contributed not a little towards making Brahminism popular.

#### THE PURANIC PANTHEON

The most important development of Puranic religion was the rise of a Trinity in place of the old Vedic gods like Indra, Pushan, Yama etc. These Vedic gods were not, however, completely discarded; Indra, for instance, still held an important position in the Puranic pantheon as king of gods; Yama, who was, in Vedic times, the president of heaven appears as the superintendent of hell in the Puranic pantheon. But the chief gods of the Puranic pantheon were the members of the Trinity: Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer.

The worship of Brahma was, it would appear, popular once but later his importance waned and at present there are no great temples in India used for his exclusive worship, though his images are found in temples dedicated to other deities.

Shiva and Vishnu, as the most important gods of the Puranic pantheon, have retained their privileged position to this day. Of the two, Shiva is the more ancient; though his function is that of destruction, he assumed a cosmic character with manifold forms, some pleasing, some terrible, some ascetic and others voluptuous. Shiva is also connected with primitive phallic cults and one of the most widely worshipped form of the god is as the Lingam or phallus.

Shiva, his wife Parvati (who has an independent cult, as we shall see presently) and sons Ganesha and Karitkeya, form the most important group of deities in the Puranic pantheon, and these have more temples in India than any other group of gods. The sect who worships Shiva as the supreme deity is known as Shaivas, and his cult and that of his spouse were widely popularised when

the Vedic religion was transformed into Puranic Brahminism. Many aboriginal godlings of India were accepted by Brahmins as forms of Shiva or of his wife, and they became the chief deities of the spirit world and had, under their charge, most of the spirits worshipped by the aborigines as well as by the barbarous tribes that invaded India. Puranic literature is full of stories of how Shiva and his spouse appeared in this world as a hunter and his sweetheart, as a fisher and his wife, how they danced and hunted with the legions of spirits that inhabit mysterious worlds. All this secured for the Shaivas the allegiance of the aborigines of India with their strange beliefs and stranger gods.

It is interesting to note that the name of Shiva, as such, is not found in the Vedas, but learned Brahmins maintained that the Vedic god Rudra was the same as Shiva. In all probability he was an important god of pre-Aryan India or of some powerful people with whom the Indo-Aryans were inimical; for early Vedic texts refer with considerable animosity to a people "whose god is the Shishna or phallus". But later these people were admitted into the Indo-Aryan fold and their phallic god obtained a pre-eminent position.

The worship of Shiva's wife as an independent deity is almost as widespread as that of Shiva but this cult belongs to the Tantric phase and will be dealt with later. Shiva's son, or rather Parvati's son (he was in fact born mysteriously of Parvati independent of Shiva) Ganesha is the most popular god of the Hindu pantheon; his elephant's head symbolises infinite wisdom, and he is a jovial god with a portly paunch and a good appetite. As the Remover of Obstacles he is invoked by every pious Hindu, whatever persuasion he may belong to, before every undertaking major or minor; even in the worship of other deities he is first invoked for the smooth progress of the ceremony, and hence he is the most widely remembered god of India.



Shiva's younger son Kartikeya is the war god of the pantheon and has temples and cults of his own. In South India he is generally known as Subrahmanya or Shunmukha (six-headed, because he has six heads). Shiva's charger Nandi, the bull, also occupies an important place in the pantheon and in all temples dedicated to Shiva can be seen images of the faithful Nandi.

Of later origine than Shaivism is Vishnavism or worship of Vishnu as the Supreme Deity. But once it was incorporated in Brahminism, the cult grew in popularity and at present is almost as important as that of Shiva. Vishnu, as the Preserver, is also the 'Saviour' of the Hindus, and he is believed to have incarnated himself as men or animals in order to save the world from the wicked. He is said to have made nine efforts to redeem mankind but his success had been but partial and the universe is still on the downward trend; he will again appear for a tenth time as Kalki, not to save but to destroy the world and begin it anew.

Vishnavism is generally informed by sound values of life and is particularly free from tendencies to animal sacrifices; the Vishnava ideal of Ahimsa is almost Buddhistic, and Vishnu himself is something of a Bodhisatva ever willing to help and save humanity. He is also capable of self-effacement when it comes to devotion, and one of his names is Bhakta Dasa or slave of the devotee. Devotion to the deity is the keynote of Vaishnavism, and some of its saints were ecstasies who lost themselves in their love of God.

Vishnu is usually represented in art as reposing on his serpent couch Ananta with his faithful wife Lakshmi or Sri sitting by his side. The deity is worshipped in this form or as in one of the nine incarnations; the most important of these were Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, and Krishna; the latter has an independent cult of his own

which is marked by considerable erotic leanings. As an example of the extent Brahminism could go in its religious synthesis may be noted the fact that the Buddha himself is accepted in Puranic religion as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Both Shaivism and Vaishnavism spread to Indian colonies in the East, and Indo-China and Java have left numerous remains of these cults in shrines and art.

The total number of deities in the Puranic pantheon is thirty three crores and three, and it is quite impossible to give here even a cursory description of the main gods and goddesses. The more important deities of the pantheon, in addition to those mentioned, are Indra, the king of gods, Yama the god of death and hells, Surya the sun-god, Chandra, the moon god, Sarasvati, wife of Brahma and the chief muse of the Hindus, and Kama the love god. \*

There are enemies of gods, too (known as Rakshasas, Asuras etc.) who wage incessant war with them. A host of other creatures like Apsaras, the celestial dancing girls, who live in free love with the Gandharvas or celestial musicians, Kinnaras or fiddle players, Pan-nagas or serpent kings etc., are also mentioned in the scriptures along with sages and saints, and Prajapatis or prolific progenitors of all kinds of beings. All these strange creatures and a good number of celestials appear in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain mythology under same or different names and it is difficult to say which religion borrowed them from the other.

#### PURANIC COSMOLOGY

Puranic religion also developed a cosmology like Buddhism, and a good part of Puranic literature deals with worlds, their origins and dissolution. These cosmologic

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\* For a detailed description of Hindu deities see author's *Epics, Myths and Legends of India*.

conceptions are more imaginative than scientific, and no revolutionary departure from religious notions took place in India as in Europe under Galileo or Copernicus. Anyway some knowledge of these religious conceptions are necessary for an understanding of Puranic Hinduism.

Like the Buddhists the Hindus divide the cosmos into three: The nether, middle and upper regions. The nucleus of this division has already been noticed in chapter II. The nether region consists of hells, twenty one according to some accounts and twenty eight according to others. Above the hells are the middle region of seven worlds inhabited by an assorted collection of mythical beings. The upper worlds rise from Bhur or earth onwards; there are seven of these upper worlds of which the highest is Brahma Loka or the heaven of Brahma, and the lowest our own earth. Heavens of other deities are built in between; the Swar Loka or the heaven of Indra, a thorough going Paradise of sensuous delights with voluptuous Apsaras, good food, wine and delightful music, is the third from the earth.

The soul's journey, after death, is vividly described in some of the Puranas. Yama and his attendants appear on the deathbed of a person and take his soul to Yama Puri or the Judgement Hall of Yama. The journey is wearisome, and only the funeral rites and the oblations offered invest the soul with a healthy Sukhshma Sarira or subtle body strong enough to undertake the journey; in the absence of proper rites the weak soul is rendered incapable of travel and, turned into a ghost, haunts the living.

Supposing the soul is healthy enough to undertake the journey, it is conducted to the Judgement Hall of Yama where Chitra Gupta, the record keeper of Yama, reads out an account of its actions. According to some schools a balance is struck of the man's good and bad deeds, and if it is to his credit he is taken to the Heaven of Indra or

some other heaven to enjoy the rewards of his good deeds; if the balance happens to go on the debit side, he is taken to one of the hells and tortured. According to certain other schools, rewards and punishments run parallel; that is, after a soul is tortured in hell for its bad deeds, it is taken to heaven to enjoy the rewards of its good deeds. Anyway, neither hells nor heavens are eternal; after the soul spends his specified life in heaven or hell, it starts its long journey to liberation through transmigration.

The Puranic conception of cosmic dynamics is even more interesting than its spatial theories. Worlds come into being and perish in cycles of time called Kalpa. A Kalpa, also called a Day of Brahma, the creator, is equivalent to 4,320,000,000 years according to human reckoning, and is divided into 1,000 Mahayugas or great ages of equal length. Each Mahayuga consists of four Yugas or ages, namely, Krita (also called Sat) Threta, Dwapara and Kali. The Sat Yuga, the Golden Age, lasts 1,728,000 years; Threta the age of greater virtue and lesser evil, 1,296,000 years; Dwapara the age of equal good and evil, 864,000 years; and Kali, the age of evil, 432,000 years. During a Mahayuga the universe degenerates through these successive ages till, when the Kali Yuga nears its end, evil so predominates that the world has to be destroyed in order to be saved. This destruction of the world comes about in the evening of Brahma's Day when the deity goes to sleep. During Brahma's sleep, Pralaya or Chaos reigns supreme. But when Brahma wakes up in the morning, order is restored and a new world is born, only to suffer the fate of its predecessor and perish after a Mahayuga. Thus the eventful days and nights of Brahma pass, till he reaches the hundredth year of his life when the old god himself dies and Maha Pralaya (Greater Cataclysm) engulfs the worlds. Space is now reduced to a hundred divine years of chaos at the end of which a new Brahma gets born of a mundane egg. Thus the process repeats itself *ad infinitum*.

There is a fatality in this process. Just as a man cannot, by taking thought, prevent old age, decay and death, the worlds and its creator are doomed to destruction, and this inevitable end cannot be prevented by human or divine efforts. Decay and dissolution are inherent in all things that exist.

The idea of the creation of the world by an Almighty God and its destruction at divine pleasure as conceived by the Semitic group of religions is foreign to the spirit of Hinduism. The cosmos is, according to Indian conceptions, more or less self-existent. Brahma gives it form and balance but is himself subject to a law of necessity which makes him create the universe; he too, as we have seen, has birth, appointed span of life and death and is, like other beings, part of the eternal scheme of things. Besides, he is an ephemeral personage lacking reality, more of a conception for convenience, the Vaishnavas claiming that he is merely a form of Vishnu while the Shaivas maintain that he is but a creative aspect of Shiva.

What causes creation is an endless Karmic process, ie: beings get born according to past Karma or deed which tends to gain momentum rather than to diminish, in the case of most creatures, and takes aeons to wear out, if at all it does; the periods of chaos do not destroy the norm but retains it in a dormant form, and Karma flares forth into life when surroundings become congenial.

It may be asked how this Karmic process ever started, how this stupendous flow of life with crores and crores of creatures, coming into being, disappearing and reappearing in a never ending stream, was first set in motion? Or taking an individual life, how and where the ego or soul had its starting point in its eventful journey.

An effort was made to explain it by an ancient sage named Kapila, the originator of a system of philosophy

called Sankhya respected by Buddhists, Jains and Hindus alike. The Sankhya is what we may call an atheistic system. Reality is conceived as dual consisting of Purushas and Prakriti. There are no equivalent English words for these Sanskrit terms, but Purushas may be said to correspond to souls, and Prakriti, matter; Prakriti in its wide sweep includes all visible worlds and their creatures, Time, Space and Causation. The Purushas are quiescent reals, innumerable; life appears when a Purusha is caught in Prakriti and this generates Karma. How a Purusha is caught in Prakriti without a third cause is not clearly explained, but the issue is evaded by the assertion that it does happen and the cause is inherent in Prakriti. Once it is enmeshed in Prakriti it joins and helps to swell the Karmic current that flows past it, the current constituting the myriads of Purushas similarly caught in past ages. The main burden of Indian religions is to teach how to liberate the Purusha from the meshes of Prakriti and obtain for it liberation to its original state of quiescence with immunity fully developed against the attacks of Prakriti for all time.

The Advaita, a later school of philosophy that gained wide popularity among the Hindus, gives another explanation of the universe; in fact it explains away the visible world and the flux of life by denying both. This whirling world of ours and millions of creatures in it, the Advaitin says, do not really exist except in our imagination. The only reality is Atman or Brahman, the immutable principle which is without change or flux, and all the rest is Maya or illusion. Even men of average intelligence can get an inkling into the illusory nature of individuality by contemplating how much reality our forefathers who lived a thousand years ago possess for us now; a few names of doubtful reality appear in records, and the rest are as nought.

The sage who has realized, through knowledge, his fundamental identity with the Brahman and the illusory

nature of his ego, is already liberated; the ignorant who have not grasped this may plod on through the mire of life. But the man who values his individuality will do well to respect the conventions and ethical codes of society; for while the sage is above all sense of good and evil, he who loves life is bound by its codes.

#### TANTRIC HINDUISM

In many primitive religions there existed practices known to anthropologists as fertility cults. Good rainfall and plentiful harvests, increase in flocks of sheep and cattle, in fact prosperity generally, was mysteriously traced to the sex activities of humans, and in the mating seasons of animals and in the flowering season of trees, it was considered necessary for humans to indulge in communal orgies in order to obtain good crops, meat and milk. These fertility cults were characteristic of certain religions of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome, and during the seasonal orgies ordinary sexual morality was set aside. With the spread of Christianity and Islam in Europe and the Middle East, these rites were either completely abolished or retained only in symbolic form in some of the popular festivals which permitted a certain amount of license not allowed in normal times.

The spirit of Indian religions, as we have seen, was averse to abolishing ancient practices, however grotesque, but was inclined to accommodate them. When primitive fertility cults were incorporated in Brahminism, the essentially mystic bent of the Brahmin mind gave them a sound philosophic basis. The importance of sex as the mainstay of life is obvious to all; all beings are born of it, and sex maintains the continuity of life. Hence the whole universe is conceived as the result of interplay of the two primal principles, the male and the female.

To the Hindu mystic, however, the female stands for the active principle and the male for the passive. The

idea is closely associated with the Sankhya philosophy in which Prakriti is conceived as female and dynamic, and Purusha as male and quiescent. Agreeable to this theory, those who extolled sex as the primal force in the universe considered gods as impotent and their Saktis (literally energy, figuratively female companions) as omnipotent; very naturally, in the Sakti cult (also known as Tantric because the Tantras are the scriptures of the cult as the Puranas are of the Puranics) goddesses are worshipped in preference to gods, and one goddess, the spouse of Shiva under her name Devi or Durga, is elevated to the position of the Supreme Deity. To the Tantrics, Shiva is subordinate to Devi.

The Tantrics do not consider the ancient precept of returning good for evil as always sound. Such an attitude, they maintain was effective and laudable in the olden days when men were good; but in this wicked age of Kali, men mistake the good for the weak, and the cause of religion is best furthered by the use of occult force.

This represents however only one side of the Tantric cult, the side with which the Vama Margi or Left Hand Sect is generally associated. But Sakti cult, in its broader sense, also conceives woman as the mother, the affectionate and loving guardian and protector of humanity; in fact the Tantrics maintain that a mother-child relation more aptly represents the connection between man and the deity than a father-son relation, as the mother in her love of her child often forgets herself while the father is something of a stern critic and a judge.

Sex and magic, somehow, have always gone together and the Tantric cult is a Sex-Magic-Power cult which aims at obtaining occult powers through what is called the five M's. The M's are Madya (intoxicating drinks); Mansa (meat); Matsya (fish), Mudra (corn) and Maithuna



(sexual intercourse); to these may be added spells, gestures and Yantras or mystic diagrams. For obvious reasons the ritual is practised in secret, and there are definite instructions to the followers of the Tantric cult not to reveal their identity but to appear in public as ardent Shaivas or Vaishnavas and outwardly conform to the practices of these sects. As a rule, the attainment of occult power, for liberation or to be used against men and spirits, is the main object of the cult and the method of achieving this varies from laborious Yogic exercises intended to liberate the hidden powers in man to the many objectionable activities practised by some of the lower orders.

The scriptures of the Tantrics are known as Tantras. These are guarded texts but a few have been made known to the public and have been translated; these show that animal sacrifices and nocturnal activities form a common feature of many rituals. Some of the milder Tantras are, however, informed by much humaneness and respect for women, and emphasise the mother aspect of the deity, while those dealing with the worship of Kali, the terror goddess of the Tantrics (and of other persuasions too) show leanings to practices which we may consider undesirable.

The Tantrics are still a powerful sect in India, though their actual strength cannot be ascertained because of the secrecy that generally shrouds the sect. In medieval times, they were particularly powerful in East India and Buddhism in its decay was dominated by the Tantric cult which appear to have been borrowed from Hinduism.

The Tantric cult spread to the countries where Hinduism had its influence felt. In the religion of the Khmers, Chams and the Hindu kingdoms of Java there was a strong Tantric streak. Hinayana countries generally kept

out of it, but in Burma there was some infiltration of Tantric Buddhism from Bengal. Among the Mahayana countries China, Japan and Korea were not affected by Tantric influences, but the cult found its most congenial soil in Tibet where it took fantastic forms. \*

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\* A more detailed account of Tantric Hinduism will be found in the author's work *Kama Kalpa*.



## CHAPTER XII

### INDIAN LITERATURE

ANCIENT and medieval Indian literature was mainly religious; works on secular subjects like medicine, astronomy, architecture, etc. have come down to us but these are so confused with revelations from gods and claims to infallibility that it is difficult to detach the profane from the sacred. The reason for this is not far to seek; most of the arts and sciences of India grew in monasteries or establishments attached to temples and as such are inextricably linked with religion. We have, however, a few secular works which we shall mention after dealing with the voluminous sacred literature of India.

#### SRUTIS

The religious literature of the Hindus fall into two main divisions: The Srutis and the Smritis. The Sruti (literally, what is heard) is revelation, not by any particular god, but rather what the great seers heard as the eternal voice, and as such is considered infallible. Anything in conflict with Sruti is reckoned heterodox, but in the absence of a central authority to fix dogma and doctrine, the powers enjoyed by interpreters were so great that even the most opposed views could be given the seal of orthodoxy. The Srutis consist mainly of Vedic literature.

The Vedas are four in number: The *Rig*, the *Sama*, the *Yajur*, and the *Atharva*. Originally, it would appear, there were only three Vedas and ancient literature refers to the triple Veda; the *Atharva Veda* was obviously a later compilation, a work pertaining to the age of assimilation of varied cultures. The *Rig Veda* is the most ancient of the four and consists mainly of hymns addressed to the ancient gods of the Indo-Aryans. The *Sama* and *Yajur Vedas* have little originality and are concerned with the arrangement of the *Rig Vedic* hymns for recitation during rituals and sacrifices.

The *Atharva Veda*, no doubt, is original, but as it stands today is a curious mixture of the sublime and the trivial. It contains a good deal of sorcery and magic, sound precepts and much wisdom, doctrines of transmigration, and descriptions of hells; the Tantrics and Puranics derived a good deal of their inspiration from the *Atharva Veda*.

The Brahmanas (ritualistic precepts) and Upanishads (mystical doctrines) as already noticed, are attached to the Vedas, and the whole together form the Srutis. This Vedic literature has been esoteric, mainly circulated among learned Brahmins. In the colonial Hindu literature of South East Asia, it has hardly any place; it was inaccessible to the generality of the masses, both in and outside India; while the Brahmins assiduously cultivated its study, it was never, except in modern times, relased for general circulation.

#### SMRITIS

Smriti or what is remembered is mainly tradition; when a Smriti is in conflict with Sruti, the latter prevails. But the Brahmanic power of stretching the meanings of texts was able to bring even Smritis which are at variance with the Srutis into perfect harmony and conformity with them.

The Smritis proper consist of the two epics, the Puranas, the Tantras, the Dharma Sastras (law codes), the Smartha Sutras (traditional aphorisms), the Vedangas (limbs of the Vedas) and the Niti Sastras (moral and ethical sciences). There are, in addition, six Darsanas treating with the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy, which stand as a class apart and are neither Srutis proper nor Smritis. We may now give here brief descriptions of some of the Smritis as these have enjoyed wide popularity and formed the basis of much other literature in India and in the Hindu kingdoms of South East Asia.

As is well known, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the two great epics of the Hindus. The *Mahabharata* is the earlier of the two and is a repository of Indo-Aryan tradition and enjoys the doubtful privilege of being the longest single poem in the world. The main story is centred round a war of succession between Kauravas and Pandavas, cousins in the ancient lunar dynasty of Indco-Aryan kings. The original was a small work in which the Pandavas were depicted as the villains and Kauravas as persecuted heroes; later it was re-written by the partisans of the Pandavas and the work as it stands today depicts the Kauravas as the villains of the piece and the Pandavas as heroes.

The *Mahabharata* is not the work of a single author, though it is generally attributed to the semi-mythical sage Vyasa, but something of a growth of centuries, and the method of weaving stories into stories, with which the readers of the *Arabian Nights* must be familiar, made interpolations easy to practise. Most of the ancient customs of the Indo-Aryans are found described in the *Mahabharata*, and the heroine, Draupadi, it is interesting to note, was the common wife of the five princes who practised fraternal polyandry, an institution still prevalent in India among certain communities of the Himalayan border. The *Mahabharata* essentially breathes the Kshatriya spirit, that love of life and war, of tournaments of royal lovers for the hand of a fair princess; with this also goes that love of nature, of forests and mountains, which is a distinctive characteristic of Sanskrit literature. Above all, the Gita, the cream of Hindu philosophy, appears in the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* best represents Hinduism in its manifold aspects, and with the profound is also found the primitive or the anthropomorphic.

The *Ramayana*, though professedly treating of happenings in the Treta against the *Mahabharata* theme

of the later Dwapara Yuga, is a later work than the *Mahabharata* and its spirit is essentially Brahmanic. As compared with the polyandrous and spirited Draupadi, Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*, is an unreal figure, more of an ideal than a character; similarly *Rama*, the hero, is a model king according to Brahmanic conceptions, detached and aloof, more of a spectator of life than a participant. The theme is the war between Rama, prince of Ayodhya, and Ravana the demon king of Lanka, the ancient Hindu name for Ceylon. The young Rama was exiled into the forests of the south through the jealousy of his stepmother and while the prince and his wife, Sita, were living in the forest, Ravana abducted Sita; she was reclaimed by Rama through the aid of his allies of the south who are described in the epic by the uncomplimentary epithets of monkeys and bears. While the *Mahabharata* is revered as the repository of Indo-Aryan tradition, the *Ramayana*, especially its later version, is essentially devotional and connected with the rise of the Bhakti cult of Vaishnavas.

Both the epics travelled with Hinduism to the countries of South East Asia, and the Kavi literature of Java, like the medieval literature of India, drew its main inspiration from the two epics. Themes from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* also supplied *motifs* to many artists of South East Asia while the stage shows in India and abroad during religious festivals were mainly inspired by stories from the two epics.

The Puranas are of much later origin than the epics. They are eighteen in number, all believed to be the work of Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata* and the compiler of the Vedas. They are, as we have seen, the popular scriptures of Hinduism, and their professed object is to explain to the masses in stories or by allegory the wisdom contained in the *Srutis* which the common man cannot comprehend because of its inaccessibility and mystical language.

Each Purana treats of five main subjects: 1) creation of the universe, 2) its destruction, 3) principal deities and patriarchs of the Hindu pantheon, 4) Manwantaras or reign of Manus or mythical world teachers, and 5) the story of the two great races of kings, the solar and lunar. The eighteen Puranas are generally divided into three groups, six said to be dedicated to Brahma, six to Vishnu and the rest to Shiva.

"The Puranas are properly the history of the gods themselves, interwoven with every variety of legendary tradition on other subjects. Viewing them as a whole the theology they teach is anything but simple, consistent or uniform. While nominally tritheistic, the religion of the Puranas is practically polytheistic and yet essentially pantheistic. Underlying their whole teaching may be discerned the one grand doctrine which is generally found at the root of Hindu theology whether Vedic or Puranic—pure compromising pantheism."

The Puranas, however, did not gain as much popularity in the colonies of India as the epics. When Hinduism was exported into Java and Indo-China, Puranic literature had not yet fully developed; hence though the religion of the colonies show many of the essential features of Puranic growth, the literary tradition of the Puranas had not fully developed before the spread of Buddhism into these lands. Once Buddhism became the important religion in the countries of South East Asia, the Puranas, it would appear, did not make much headway there.

The Tantras, as already stated, are little known works, but those released for public circulation show that they too like the Puranas treat of five subjects. The first three sections are common to both texts, but the fourth subject the Tantras treat is 'attainment of superhuman faculties', and the fifth, 'the four modes of union with the Sakti.' In addition, the following subjects are also dealt with in most

of the Tantras: "Praise of female energy; spells for bringing people into subjection; or making them enamoured; spells for causing lunacy; for fattening, for destroying sight, for producing dumbness, deafness and causing similar afflictions; for bringing on miscarriage, destroying crops and preventing various kinds of evil; modes of worshipping the goddess Kali; worship of the female emblem with the adjuncts of wine, flesh, meat, corn and women."

The exact number of Tantras is not known. The more important among those that have come to light are: *Mahanirvana*, *Kularnava*, *Syamarahasya*, *Saradatilaka*, *Kamada*, *Kamakhya*, *Rudrayamala*, *Kalika*, *Uddisa* and *Mantramahabodhi*.

The Dharma Sastra is the collective name for the law books of the Hindus, forty seven in number according to some authorities, and twenty according to others. Of these the most ancient and authoritative is the *Code of Manu*. This code has inspired other law books, and form the basis of Hindu law, not only in India but in all countries of South East Asia and Manu's authority has not been completely replaced by others; even in Buddhist countries like Burma and Siam, his code was the basis from which jurisprudence developed.

The Smartha Sutras generally lay down rules for performance of domestic ceremonies, funeral rites etc. They are more ancient than the Dharma Sastras, though less important, and even Manu refers to some of them. The Smartha Sutras are generally attached to the Vedas.

Under the heading Vedangas come astronomy, grammar, lexicography and allied subjects. Why these should be treated as sacred literature may seem incomprehensible to non-Hindu readers, but in rituals, the correct pronunciation and accents of spells repeated are matters of paramount importance, and a knowledge of



astronomy and astrology are necessary for fixing correct time and place for ceremonials.

The Niti Sastras contain, in addition to regular moral precepts, those beast fables for which India has always been famous. Story telling is a regular feature of religious and secular instruction among the Hindus, and the dull who cannot grasp precepts direct are made wise by stories with a moral. The *Pancha Tantra*, the famous beast fables of India, are said to be the work of a statesman who taught the dull sons of a king the principles of statecraft by means of these stories.

#### SECULAR SANSKRIT LITERATURE

One of the most ancient works that treat of the science of polity is the *Artha Sastra* of Chanakya, already mentioned. The Hindus and Buddhists had distinguished themselves in many other sciences, particularly in astronomy, medicine, geometry and algebra, and even in the science of erotics.

A very important work on astronomy is Varaha Mihira's *Pancha Siddhantika* (five systems) which gives an exposition of five schools of astronomy that were prevalent in his time. Varahamihira is believed to have been a contemporary of Vikramaditya by some authorities while others consider him a later writer. Exact chronology is difficult in Indian literature, but it is interesting to note that one of the Siddhantas of Varahamihira is called Romaka or Roman. The Romaka makes calculations for the meridian of Yavanapuri (city of the Greeks) and the Paulika Siddhanta gives the difference in longitude between Yavanapuri and Ujjain. All this would show that Greek and Indian astronomers had a meeting place in India or elsewhere.

Even more ancient than the works on astronomy were the medical treatises of India. The originator of the science of medicine is believed to be a semi-mythical

personage named Dhanwantari, and the science itself is known as Ayur Veda which indicates that it was considered as good as the Veda; in fact Ayur Veda is considered a subsidiary Veda (Upa Veda) of the *Atharva Veda*. One of the greatest exponent of the science was Charaka who is said to have lived in the court of Kanishka. A treatise ascribed to this ancient physician and surgeon is still extant.

The Indian stage is as ancient as Asvaghosha who lived in Kanishka's reign, if not earlier. The greatest playwright of India was, however, Kalidasa whose *Sakuntala* is considered one of the masterpieces of the world. Like most of the playwrights of India, Kalidasa too generally borrowed his themes from the epics and adapted them for the stage. A departure from this convention is the *Mricchakatika* of Sudraka. The play opens with a street scene in the city of Ujjain. The main characters in the play are Vasantasena a courtesan, a simple but noble-minded Brahmin who was in love with her, a villainous courtier Samstanaka and a gambler. It is refreshingly free from gods and demons and supernatural happenings.

Anyway, barring the epics, the code of Manu, and some Puranic literature, the circulation of Hindu Sanskrit literature in the countries of South East Asia was not considerable, though no doubt, Sanskrit was the court language of most of them. Hence more important to our theme than Hindu Sanskrit literature is the Buddhist literature that originated in India.

#### THE PALI CANON

As we have seen the Buddhist Canon was fixed in Pali in the third Buddhist council held in the year 243 B. C. under the auspices of Asoka. The canon, in conformity with tradition was orally transmitted and was written down only after some centuries. With the fall of the Mauryan empire, the study of Pali was neglected in

India and with the reaction in favour of Sanskrit which was accepted as the official language of the Mahayana, Pali fell into oblivion. Yet Pali had an interesting career as the language of the Hinayana in countries outside India.

It would appear a teacher named Revata wished to revive the general interest in Pali but he found no authentic texts and commentaries in India. Ceylon was then considered the centre of orthodoxy of Thera Vada Buddhism; Mahendra had taken the Pali Canon to the island and the monasteries in Ceylon had the reputation of having preserved the canon in its purity and entirety. So Revata deputed his disciple Buddhaghosha to go to Ceylon and bring the Pali Canon to India.

This Buddhaghosha was a remarkable man. He was a Brahmin of Bodhgaya converted to Buddhism by Revata, and like all neophytes was fired with zeal for his new faith. He was a scholar with a flair for languages, and when Revata suggested that he should go to Ceylon to study Pali, he immediately closed in with the proposal. So, after mastering the language as it existed in India, Buddhaghosha went to Ceylon. He reached Ceylon during the reign of king Mahanama (458-480).

But Buddhaghosha found no Pali Canon in Ceylon; there was, however, a flourishing Sinhalese Canon. What happened was this: The canon was no doubt introduced into Ceylon by Mahendra in the third century B. C, but was orally transmitted. About the year 20 B. C. in the reign of the Sinhalese monarch Vattagamini, after much dispute among the monks, the canon was reduced to writing. After this Sinhalese rose as the national language and medium of literary expression in Ceylon, and a monk named Mahadhammakathi who was partial to Sinhalese translated the Pali Canon into Sinhalese. With this the study of Pali fell into greater neglect in Ceylon than in India and the original Pali texts were lost beyond redemption.

Buddhaghosha, however, refused to accept defeat. An accomplished Pali scholar, he decided to re-translate the Sinhalese Canon into Pali. The Sinhalese monks discouraged him as he did not know Sinhalese. But Buddhaghosha applied himself to the study of Sinhalese and within a short period mastered it and composed in this language the *Vishuddhi-Magga* or way of purity, a work in its spiritual loftiness is compared to the *Imitation of Christ*. The excellence of this work and the general proficiency he obtained in Sinhalese convinced the monks of Ceylon that Buddhaghosha was in every way competent to retranslate the canon into Pali, and they now placed their treasured literature at the disposal of Buddhaghosha. He laboured at the work of translation for several years and after completing it, took copies to India or, according to Burmese tradition, to Burma. Anyway, Buddhaghosha re-instituted the study of Pali in Ceylon, and from now on, Pali again became the religious language of the Hinayana countries.

The Pali Canon as it stands at present falls into three main divisions: 1) The Vinaya or rules of monastic discipline, 2) Sutta or precepts, and 3) Abhidhamma or additional doctrine treating mainly of higher doctrines and metaphysics. Under each of these heads are classified several works. The *Sutta Pitaka*, for instance, has five sub-divisions one of which, known as *Khudda Nikaya*, has fifteen works including the famous *Jataka Tales* and *Dhammapada*.

Besides the regular works of the Pitakas, there are commentaries known as *Athakatha*, literally, telling of meanings, and all these works together form a formidable body of literature.

Buddhaghosha's translation of the canon was taken to Burma and from here to Siam and Cambodia when Hinayana Buddhism spread to these countries, and this common canon contributed not a little to make Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia one religious unit with monks

and ecclesiastial dignitaries of one country visiting others, comparing notes on orthodoxy and generally supplying clergy to each other when any country stood in need of them.

#### BUDDHIST SANSKRIT CANON

Because of the close contact maintained by the Hinayana countries and their fidelity to the Thera Vada school, the Pali Canon has remained to this day, practically the same as translated by Buddhaghosha, and its exegetical literature generally conform to the spirit of the canon. But the Mahayana Canon had a varied career; the spirit of the Mahayana was mainly towards synthesis rather than orthodoxy, and in different countries commentaries and original works are included in the canon, and Tibet and China particularly developed Mahayana Canons each in its own way. While the Thera Vada school maintained that the canon was finally fixed in the Third Council, the Mahayanists kept the canon an open book, not to be fixed or sealed at a definite time, but to receive revelations by Bodhisatvas or Buddhas from time to time. As such the Sanskrit Canon has no definiteness like the Pali Canon.

The nucleus round which the Sanskrit Canon developed may be said to be three works compiled in Sanskrit as commentaries on the existing canon under the auspices of the Fourth Council held in Kanishka's reign. These were called Upadesha, Vinaya Vibhasha and Abhidharma Vibhasha corresponding to the Sutta, Vinaya and Abhidhamma respectively of the Pali Canon. Kanishka and his successors, as we have seen, were ardent patrons of Sanskrit and many important Sanskrit works on Buddhism appeared in the Kushan period. The Kushan dynasty, no doubt, died out, but Sanskrit literature flourished, and an independent Sanskrit Canon which had severed its connection with the ancient Pali texts became the official scriptures of Mahayana Buddhists. Since Buddhism died out in India, many important Buddhist works were

lost in India, but translations of some are available in Chinese and Tibetan. In Nepal, however, nine Sanskrit works forming the Nepalese Canon are preserved and these are considered the original works of the Sanskrit Canon and brief descriptions of these are given below.

1) PRAJNANAPARIMITA or Transcendental Wisdom : The work claims to be a collection of discourses delivered by Gautama Buddha in a place called Vulture's Peak in Rajagriha. Most of the works of the Sanskrit Canon are considered revelations by the Buddha, and the Mahayanists explain their absence in the older canon by the fiction that they lay buried or hidden till Mahayana saints or doctors capable of understanding them reclaimed them and brought them to light for the benefit of humanity. The Prajnanaparimita collection generally treats of the doctrine of the Void, the central theme of the Madhyamika school of Buddhist philosophy founded by Nagarjuna, and as such, its authorship is ascribed to this scholar-saint of Mahayana Buddhism; while a good part of the work might have been compiled by him, the collection as it stands at present has a range of centuries and later authors must have considerably added to its bulk.

In the second century of the Christian era, some portions of the work were translated into Chinese, and this would indicate that the original work is of considerable antiquity though not of the same volume as at present, and is almost as old as Mahayana Buddhism. Huiyen Tsang translated the version extant in his time into a volume of 200,000 verses; other versions and translations are mentioned as consisting of 8,000 verses, 10,000, 25,000, 100,000 or 125,000.

The *Prajnanaparimita* may be considered the most important work of the Mahayana Canon, and is popular in all Mahayana countries. A thorough knowledge of this text

had raised many mediocrities to the position of Bodhisatvas. The text itself is deified in some countries and worshipped as a goddess. The *Diamond Cutter* is the most important work in the *Prajnanaparimita* collection and a summary of it, known as the *Heart of Prajnanaparimita*, is specially popular in Japan,

2) GANDAVYUHA or Structure of the Universe : The work is so called because it compares the universe to a bubble. The doctrine of Sunyata or Void is stressed in this work too. Translations of this work under the same name are not found, but it is said to be part of a work called *Avatamsaka Sutra* translated into Chinese; if this is correct, the earlier parts of the *Gandavyuha* must be at least as ancient as those of the *Prajnanaparimita*, for the *Avatamsaka Sstras* were translated into Chinese in the year 170 A. D.

The work in addition to the doctrine of the void, teaches pantheism of a sort implied in the Adi Buddha doctrine but does not neglect to preach redemption of creatures by Bodhisatvas.

3) DASABHUMISVARA or Ten Stages of Buddhahood: The book describes in detail the ten stages by which a Bodhisatva attains Buddhahood or supreme wisdom. The text is deemed of celestial origin, being a discourse delivered by the Buddha when he visited Trayatimsa heaven; one among the audience, a Bodhisatva named Vajragarbha, asked the distinguished visitor how a Bodhisatva could attain Buddhahood and an edifying discourse followed.

The date of the compilation is not known, but this or a similar work was translated into Chinese in the latter part of the 3rd century A. D.

4) SAMADHIRAJA or the King of Meditative Bliss: This is a work on different forms of meditation of which

the best is said to be Samadhiraja, expounded in detail. In elucidating the stages of meditation, the book also deals with the main tenets of Mahayana Buddhism. The expounder is Sakya Muni (Gautama Buddha), who for the benefit of a rich merchant of Rajagriha named Chandraprabha, is said to have delivered the discourse on Vulture's Peak.

The date of the original is not known, but the work was translated into Chinese in the fifth century A. D.

5) LANKAVATARA SUTRA or The Discourse Delivered in Lanka: The discovery and making known this work to the world is attributed to one Jina of the kingdom of Champa in India, but it purports to be a discourse delivered by Gautama Buddha when he visited Lanka (ancient name of Ceylon). According to this story the Buddha flew over space to a mountain named Malaya in Lanka and here several dignitaries came to pay their respects to the Blessed One, and one of them was Ravana, the ten-headed King of Ramayana fame. This king asked the Buddha elucidation on certain difficult points concerning virtue and vice, while the Bodhisatva Manjusri who was also present on the occasion, wished to know something about abstruse points on law and doctrine; the Buddha then delivered a discourse explaining all.

The title and the story would indicate that the author had considerable interest in propagating Mahayana doctrines in Ceylon which had been particularly loyal to the Thera Vada school. Anyway, the *Lankavatara* is a mature product of the Mahayana; for while criticising the Brahmin schools of philosophy, it explains why the Mahayana itself was tending to become more and more like a sect of Brahminism.



6) SADDHARMA PUNDARIKA or the Lotus of the Good Law. This text is almost as important as the *Prajnanaparimita*. It teaches the validity of the various vehicles in the matter of attaining Nirvana. Its emphasis is on cosmic importance and on eternity before which individuals and even humanity appear insignificant. The *Lotus* is one of the early texts of the Mahayana. Nagarjuna refers to it and it was translated into Chinese in the third century of the Christian era. The text is particularly popular in the Far East, and is the special gospel of the Nichiren sect of Japan. Nichiren "did not only convince himself that he, personally, was mentioned in the *Lotus of the Good Law*, but also that the Japanese were the chosen race that would regenerate the world."

7) LALITA VISTARA. This is one of the oldest books of the Sanskrit Canon. It gives a miraculous account of Gautama Buddha's life from birth till enlightenment, and Asvaghosha's famous work, the *Buddhacharita* was obviously based on it. The work is believed to have existed when the Pali Canon was fixed, though not in the present form. A Chinese translation was made during the Han period, but the original translation was lost and only references to it are available at present.

8) THATHAGATA GUHYAKA OR SRIGUHYASAMAJA: This is an esoteric text of Tantric Buddhism. Obviously a late work compiled after Tantric cults came into prominence, it was translated into Chinese in the ninth century of the Christian era, but the translators expurgated a good part of the text as objectionable; for the Chinese and Japanese have never taken kindly to the sex cults of Tantric Buddhism though they had shown an accommodating spirit as far as its magical side was concerned.

9) SUVARNA PRABHASHA or the Glitter of Gold. This is a highly philosophical work deriving its basic theories from the Lotus of the Good Law, but also contains a good many legends, magical formulae and spells and charms against evil spirits. It was translated into Chinese in the fifth century and became specially popular among the Mongols.

The *Suvarna Prabhasha* claims to be a discourse delivered by Gautama Buddha at Rajagriha to an assemblage of worthies including some of the deities of the Hindu pantheon.

In Nepal, these nine texts are known as Nine Dharmas; these are personified and worshipped, but few study them. As such the growth of religious literature in Nepal has been negligible when compared with the prodigious efforts of Tibetan and Chinese scholiasts.



## CHAPTER XIII

### INDIA IN HUIEN TSANG'S TIME

A CHARACTERISTIC national virtue of the Chinese is that they have always been more anxious to learn than to teach. From the time of the introduction of Buddhism into China, the Chinese had taken more interest in learning Buddhism in India than Indian missionaries in propagating it in China. Even the introduction of Buddhism into China was something of a proselytisation in reverse, as Saint-Hilaire points out; for Buddhism was not preached in China by Buddhist missions sent out from India by an Indian Buddhist monarch or organisation, but a Chinese emperor sent a mission to India to obtain a teacher from here. This process of 'proselytisation in reverse' has been a peculiar feature Sino-Indian Buddhist history.

In Chapter IX we have dealt with the pilgrimage of Fa Hien and his memorable journeys. The age of Chinese pilgrims into India started even before the time of Fa Hien, for a Chinese monk named Chi-tao'an is said to have travelled to India in the beginning of the fourth century, some hundred years before Fa Hien reached India. He wrote an account of his travels but this work has not come down to us, though reference to it has been made by later writers. Anyway from the time of Fa Hien whose memoirs created an unusual interest in India among the Chinese, pilgrimage to India by monks, not merely to acquire merit but to study Buddhism at first hand and obtain authentic texts, became a regular feature of Chinese religious life.

During the troubled days of Toramana and Mihirakula, two Chinese pilgrims Sung Yun and Hui Sheng visited Udayana and Gandhara; they did not visit India proper obviously because of the hostility of the Huns. In Gandhara, however, they found Buddhism in a flourishing state, and from this country they took back to China

170 volumes of Mahayana literature. Anyway during the Hun domination the atmosphere in India was not congenial for Buddhist pilgrims; for not only in the west but in the east also we read of accounts of persecution. In 600 A. D. we are told a king of Bengal named Sasanka "who worshipped Shiva, attempted to extirpate Buddhism in his dominions and destroyed the Bo-tree"; the tree was restored only through a miracle.

Anyway, after the defeat of the Huns and the rise of the kingdom of Kanauj under Harsha, conditions again returned to the normal in India; in China the T'angs had come into power and under them in the classical age of China started. The T'angs were great patrons of art, architecture, letters and religion and in their reign the greatest era of Chinese pilgrimage into India began. Hundreds of Chinese pilgrims visited India during this period; some died here, others returned. The pilgrim I-Ching who visited India and the Malay Archipelago in the seventh century wrote a biography of sixty Chinese pilgrims who travelled to India and adjoining Buddhist countries in the century; this work deals with only a select number of pilgrims, and many more came to India though their names and activities have not found a place in records so far discovered.

Of the many pilgrims who visited India during the T'ang period, Huien Tsang was the most important as far as our subject is concerned. Huien Tsang was born in 600 A. D. of a family of Mandarins and his father was an ardent Confucian. He was the youngest of four sons, and like a good Confucian studied the classics and obtained proficiency in them. One of his brothers, however, became a convert to Buddhism and this interested the young scholar in the tenets and literature of this religion; eventually Huien Tsang too became a convert to Buddhism and was ordained a monk at the age of twenty.

For some time Huien Tsang visited the famous monasteries and Buddhist centres of learning in China and

studied the scriptures available here, but was dissatisfied with the existing translations of many texts and he decided to go to India and examine the originals preserved in this country. He wanted to travel along the old route Fa Hien had taken through Central Asia but permission was refused by the civil authorities as Central Asia was, at that time, in a troubled state and most of the kingdoms were inimical to China. So Huien Tsang was obliged to travel without a passport.

Like Fa Hien he started from Chang-'an, in A. D. 529, and continued his journey through Central Asia, but he took a slightly different route on the advice of a friendly chief who gave him letters of recommendation to well disposed persons on the way to facilitate the pilgrim's journey.

#### NALANDA AND VALLABHI

Huien Tsang spent about sixteen years in India. Unlike Fa Hien who was more or less a travelling spectator of the Indian scene, Huien Tsang took an active part in the intellectual life of India in his time, and seems to have been as much at home in India as in China. He studied five years in the famous university of Nalanda and was one of its most able disputants and logicians; he always speaks of Nalanda and its abbot Silabhadra in the most reverent tone. The scholarship of the pilgrim and his fame attracted the attention of Harsha or Siladitya, the emperor of Kanauj, and from their first meeting till the pilgrim's departure, Harsha was an avowed patron of the pilgrim who was present in the court on all memorable occasions.

Huien Tsang has left us many descriptions of Nalanda. "The monks of Nalanda", he says, "to the number of several thousands are men of the highest ability. Their conduct is pure and unblameable, although the rules of the monastery are severe. The day is not sufficient for

asking and answering questions. From morning till night the monks engage themselves in discussion, the old and young mutually helping one another. Those who cannot discuss questions out of the Tripitaka are little esteemed, and are obliged to hide themselves for shame. Hence learned men from different cities come here in multitude to settle their doubts; thence the stream of their wisdom spread far and wide. For this reason some persons usurp the name of Nalanda students, and in going to and fro receive honour in consequence."

Further, "if men from other quarters desire to enter and take part in the discussions, the keeper of the gate proposes some hard questions; those who are unable to answer, have to retire. One must have studied deeply both old and new books, before gaining admission. Those students who come as strangers, have to show their ability by hard discussion; those who fail as compared with those who succeed are as seven or eight to ten".

It would appear men for the higher cadre of public service in the country were recruited from the graduates of Nalanda. Recognition of merit was also accorded by giving grants of land.

Huien Tsang says that Nalanda was not a single establishment but consisted of six monasteries built by several kings and enclosed by a surrounding wall which had but one gate. It owned some 200 villages. The main buildings had eight halls each with accommodation for more than 3,000 monks. Nalanda was an international centre of learning and students from several countries in India and abroad studied there. In addition to the study of religion and philosophy, the faculties included arts and sciences and the establishment was liberally endowed by monarchs not only of India but of Ceylon and other Buddhist countries and even Hindu Kingdoms of South East Asia.

Another great university for religious and secular studies was at Vallabhi in Gujerat. Here too the establishment consisted of several monasteries with 6,000 monks.

Anyway, it is noteworthy that while the names of several celebrities attached to these universities have been given, Santi Deva, the greatest Buddhist literary figure of the age, had nothing to do with either Nalanda or Vallabhi. The universities, it would appear, produced great professors but few thinkers.

#### POLEMICS

Under the impetus given to learning by Nalanda and other centres, polemics became the passion of the learned. Huien Tsang obtained proficiency in Sanskrit which gave him ample opportunities for taking part in the discussions in which he conducted himself well; his fame as a disputant spread throughout the country and he came to be known in India as the Master of the Law from China. He disputed not only with Brahmins and other non-Buddhists but even with the Hinayana Buddhists. A story typical of the seriousness with which the learned at the time took polemics is narrated by Huien Tsang. A disputant of a sect he calls Lokayata, came to Nalanda to challenge the Buddhists; he wrote down the main forty articles of his system and hung up the document at the gate of Nalanda university, with the following legend written under: "If any one can refute a single article, he may cut off my head to proclaim his victory".

Death, it would appear, was the general penalty for defeat in this sort of challenge. As an alternative, the victor had the option to convert the defeated disputant into his own faith.

The challenge, we are told, hung at the gates of Nalanda for several days without any one daring to accept it; though the Lokayata did not expressly state it, the implication naturally was that if any Buddhist accepted

the challenge and was defeated, he too like the Lokayata was expected to offer his head. Anyway, Huien Tsang in the end asked one of his disciples to take the challenge sheet and bring it to him; when it was brought, the learned Master of the Law tore it to pieces and trampled it under his feet. The Lokayata was then summoned before Silabhadra and other learned monks and in the dispute that followed Huien Tsang, we are told, refuted the opinions of not only the Lokayata sect but of the Bhutas, Nirgranthas, Kapalikas, Sankhyikas and Vaisesikas. The Lokayata admitted defeat and told Huien Tsang that he was free to cut off his head. The Master of the Law, who had taken the vow of non-injury, however, refused to kill the Lokayata but took him as his slave; he must have been a troublesome slave, for after some time he set the Lokayata free. The story, it is good to remember, is told by Huien Tsang and not by the Lokayata or his partisans.

The Master of the Law mentions another public disputation conducted under the auspices of king Harsha during a festival at Kanauj which was attended by eighteen kings, and a large concourse of people from all over India. A huge Pandal was erected; after a statue of the Buddha had been duly installed and worshipped, a learned discussion on very abstruse points took place in the presence of Harsha and his eighteen friends and tributaries. Huien Tsang was requested by the king to take the chair. At first, the learned president ordered one of his disciples from Nalanda to make known his prolegomena to the public, and had a copy of it hung at the door of the Pandal; to this he added, like the learned disputants of the time, that 'if any one finds a single erroneous word in this, and is capable of refuting it, I will let him cut off my head to show him my gratitude.'

Though there were about two thousand monks and Brahmins of various persuasions in the assembly no one accepted the challenge of the pilgrim. This can be under-



stood; for Harsha, coming to know of the animosity the learned monk's love of polemics had roused among Brahmins and monks of the Little Vehicle had given peremptory orders that none was to speak against the Master of the Law. As such there was very little discussion and Huien Tsang was declared the victor of the day. There was, however, some confusion as one of the Pandals erected for the accommodation of the disputants caught fire; an attempt on the life of the king was made, a plot was discovered to assassinate the king and Huien Tsang, and the miscreants were punished.

Anyway, learning was held in great esteem in India; the saint had receded into the background giving precedence to the scholar. "The Buddhist scholar", says Huien Tsang, "who can explain three classes of sacred texts has allotted to him different servants to attend and obey him. He who can explain five classes of scriptures is allotted an elephant, while he who can explain six classes was given a surrounding escort..... If a monk distinguished himself in public disputation by refined language, subtle investigation, deep penetration and severe logic, then he is mounted on an elephant covered with precious ornaments and conducted by a numerous suite to the gates of the abbey. If, on the contrary, one of the disputants breaks down in his argument or uses poor language or negligent phrases, or violates a rule in logic, they proceed to disfigure his face with red and white powder, cover his body with dirt and dust, and carry him off to a deserted place or leave him in a ditch. Thus they distinguish between the meritorious and the worthless, between the wise and the foolish".

#### H A R S H A

We do not know what the Buddha might have said of this method of distinguishing between the meritorious and the worthless. Anyway Huien Tsang was in his element in these intellectual acrobatics, and never lost an

opportunity of fighting erroneous doctrines whether held by Brahmins or by Hinayna monks. Under his influence even Harsha, though born and brought up a Hindu, inclined to the Mahayanist persuasion.

The Chinese pilgrim also describes a quinquennial distribution of alms by Harsha held at Prayag (Allahabad) at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna. This spot has been traditionally held to be the most suitable for almsgiving as one coin given here is said to be as good as a hundred given elsewhere. It was Harsha's practice to let treasure accumulate for five years and then distribute it among the poor and the needy. Holy men of all persuasions came to the spot and received alms without any distinction of caste or creed. The Pancha Parishad or quinquennial assembly lasted seventy five days, at the end of which Harsha had distributed all that he had in his treasury; he even gave away his garments and was obliged to borrow clothes from his sister. On return to the capital, his treasury was replenished by his nobles and allies.

The age of Harsha was marked by considerable literary activity. The king himself was a man of letters and was equally proficient in Buddhist and Brahmanic lore. His work *Nagananda* has a Jataka story for its plot, while other works attributed to him have Brahmanic leanings. Bana was a Brahmin savant attached to his court and was an accomplished writer of Sanskrit prose. Mayura and Subandhu were other writers who enjoyed Harsha's patronage. The versatile Bhartrihari who oscillated between the court and the monastery seven times and whose aphorisms are household words in India was a contemporary of Harsha.

After Harsha's death in 647 A. D. gloom again spreads over Indian history and when the curtain rings up again, northern India is split up among several Rajput clans and the Muslims are on the scene.

## HUIEN TSANG'S RETURN TO CHINA

Huien Tsang returned to China by the Central Asian route and before reaching China took care to write to the emperor why he left his homeland without official permission. The emperor not only pardoned him but ordered the governor of his western capital to receive the pilgrim with the greatest honour. From the borders of China to the capital at Lo-yang, Huien Tsang was conducted by high officers of the realm, and the whole community of Buddhist monks at Lo-yang together with the citizens went out to meet him, and the emperor gave him a special audience. No such ovation was ever given, either before or after, to a pilgrim returned from India.

The inventory, kept in official records, of what the pilgrim brought from India is interesting :

"First, one hundred and fifty particles of Sariras (relics from the Buddha's body).

"Secondly, a golden statue of the Buddha whose shadow had remained in the Dragon's Grotto, on the Pragbuddhagiri mountain, in the kingdom of Magadha, with a pedestal of a transparent substance three feet three inches high, similar to the statue of the Buddha that is seen in the kingdom of Varanasi (Benaras), which represents him turning for the first time the Wheel of the Law in the Deer Park.

"Thirdly, a sandal-wood statue of the Buddha three feet five inches high, exactly like the one the king of Kosambi had caused to be modelled from life.

"Fourthly, a sandal-wood statue two feet nine inches high, similar to the one in the kingdom of Kapitha, representing the Thathagatha descending from the Heaven of the Devas.

"Fifthly, a silver statue four feet high, similar to the one representing the Buddha explaining the Lotus of the Good Law, and other sacred texts, on the Vulture's Peak.

"Sixthly, a golden statue of the Buddha three feet five inches in height, similar to the shadow he left in Nagarahara, and which represents him as overcoming a venomous dragon.

"Seventhly, carved statue in sandal-wood, one foot three inches high, similar to the one in the kingdom of Vaisali which represents the Buddha going round the city to convert mankind".

These icons, it would appear, served as models for Chinese artists who were then building up great schools of art under the prosperous reign of the T'angs. Even more important than these art treasures were the books Huien Tsang took from India. These works consisted of ten classes and the total collection numbered about 800 books; twenty two horses were required to carry them.

Rest of Huien Tsang's life was devoted to the translation of these works. Twenty three monks, the most talented in China, assisted him while an army of copyists struggled at multiplying the translations. Huien Tsang himself undertook the translation of the *Prajnanaparimita*.

Huien Tsang died in the year 664 after having completed the translation of the *Prajnanaparimita*. The dying wish of this great missionary, saint, pilgrim and scholar has been faithfully recorded by his disciples. "I came, you know", said he, "to the palace of Yuhua-Kong by reason of the book *Prajnanaparimita*; now that this work is finished, I feel that my life is coming to an end. When, after my death, you carry me to my last abode, let it be done in a simple and humble manner. You will wrap my body in a mat, and lay it down in the midst of a valley, in a peaceful and lonely spot. Avoid the vicinity of a palace or a convent, for a body as impure as mine must be placed far from such buildings". Though an intellectual, Huien Tsang's faith was as strong as his intellectualism; it was in fact faith that inspired his intellect and his arduous

pilgrimage. His last prayer was to be born in Tusita Heaven to be an attendant on Maitreya the future Buddha.

In Huiien Tsang's accounts of his travels, it is related that he consulted several Sanskrit works on history, and geography of India, and from references to several books he mentions, it is clear that in his time there were in India regular official annals and chronicles, as well as books on religious history. None of these works have, however come down to us, and it is likely that they contained much valuable information which has now been lost to us. These works were not probably very factual, but were on the nature of legendary accounts but along with much myth they must have contained a good deal of historical data.

The pilgrim's itinerary was confined to northern India; he did not visit South India but has left some accounts of the south based on information he collected. The people of the south, according to Huiien Tsang, were not very religious but were given to the pursuit of gain. Kanchi, the port of the Pallavas was an important centre of Buddhism at the time and it may be recalled that Boddhidharma had sailed from this port a century before Huiien Tsang's visit and founded, in China, the Ch'an school of Buddhism. Huiien Tsang does not mention Bodhidharma; probably the Ch'an school had not come into prominence in his time.

Huiien Tsang found the caste system flourishing in India, and he admired the Brahmins for their love of learning. The Vedas were studied in Buddhist centres of learning like Nalanda as secular literature, and though this was certainly considered sacriligious by Brahmins, there was no organised opposition or persecution. The Buddhist doctrine of non-injury was gaining ground among the better classes of Hindus too. The pilgrim also noticed the way of life of the castes: "The Kshatriyas and Brahmins are cleanly and wholesome in their dress, and

they live in a homely and frugal way. There are rich merchants who deal in gold trinkets and so on. They mostly go barefoot; few wear sandals. They stain their teeth red or black. They bind up their hair and pierce their ears. They are very particular about personal cleanliness. All wash before eating; they never use food left over from a former meal. Wooden and stone vessels must be destroyed after use; metal ones are well polished and rubbed. After eating they cleanse their mouth with willow sticks, and wash their hands and mouths". In these respects India has changed little from Huien Tsang's time.

#### OTHER CHINESE PILGRIMS AND MISSIONS

Huien Tsang's visit, the accounts of his travels, and the nation wide fame he enjoyed considerably enhanced the prestige of Buddhism and of India among the Chinese. The *Si-yu-ki*, as his travel accounts are called, inspired many Chinese writers who produced a good deal of romantic literature and tales of adventure. Huien Tsang's visit had a political side too. While the pilgrim was in India, Harsha sent a diplomatic mission to the Chinese emperor. The fortunes of this embassy are not known. But after Huien Tsang's return to China he seems to have prevailed upon the emperor to send a return mission to India, for in 643 an ambassador named Li-yi-pio was despatched from China to the court of Harsha. The mission was well received by Harsha and the emissaries travelled in several regions of India and returned to China in 647. The reception given to this mission and the favourable report it submitted to the emperor led to the despatch of another mission to India under Wang Huian Ts'o, and this embassy had a mixed reception. For Harsha had died and his minister usurped the throne when Wang Huian Ts'o's mission came; what actually took place between the usurper and the ambassador is not known but the latter's escorts were killed, his camp plundered and he himself had to flee for life to Nepal. Tibet, Nepal and China were

under a tripartite alliance at the time, and the insulted ambassador raised an army in Tibet and Nepal, invaded the kingdom of the usurper and took him prisoner to China. After this, Wang Hsuan Ts'o found the Indian atmosphere congenial for pilgrimage and adventure, and he is said to have made three more journeys to India. One was for the express purpose of obtaining a Brahmin wizard who claimed to possess a charm of immortality; the wizard actually reached China and had a special audience with the emperor who, however, was not convinced of the Brahmin's ability to grant immortality to Chinese sovereigns.

Hsien Tsang created an intense interest in China for pilgrimages and travels to India and a great number of Chinese monks came to India; of these I-Ching deserves special mention. Unlike most other pilgrims from China, he took the sea route to India. In 671 A. D. I-Ching, along with many other monks took passage on a merchantman bound for the southern islands; the sea so frightened his companions that no sooner had they boarded the ship than they disembarked, and I-Ching was obliged to travel alone. The pilgrim first travelled to Sumatra where he stayed for one year. He found Sumatra, Java and the Malay Peninsula in a flourishing state; Sumatra was an important maritime kingdom and sailings to India and China were regular. Both Buddhism and Brahminism prevailed here though the former was in the ascendant. In Funan (Indo-China) Buddhism had been preached but a wicked king exterminated the religion of the Buddha here and in consequence the prevailing religion was Brahminism.

I-Ching then passed on to India and spent about ten years at Nalanda studying and copying the scriptures. Like Fa Hien he was more inclined to the study of Vinaya or monastic discipline, whereas Hsien Tsang's special subject was Abhidharma or philosophy. I-Ching's accounts are purely religious and lack the breadth of vision of Hsien Tsang's.

Anyway, there was something in these Chinese pilgrims that the Indians generally lacked. An Indian missionary took his religion so seriously that he was completely engrossed in his sacred mission and scarcely took any notice of the people around him; he was concerned only with eternal verities and considered the differences in the way of life of various peoples of the world too trivial to deserve his attention. The Chinese, on the other hand, even when most devout, retained something of the pragmatism characteristic of their nation. Hence we find that though many ancient Indians travelled to far off countries, none has left us any accounts of the strange peoples amidst whom they lived.

With the departure of I-Ching, the great age of Sino-Indian contact may be said to have stopped. In China the T'ang empire collapsed and an age of political confusion started. In India the advance guards of Islam, the Third Empire of Belief, had appeared, and Sind fell to the Muslims in 712 A. D. In the centuries that followed, India far from being able to lend cultural support to others had to fight desperately for preserving her own independence and culture.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### DECAY OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA MUSLIM CONQUEST AND THE END OF INDIAN CULTURAL EXPANSION

THE disappearance of Buddhism in India is one of the mysteries of history that has not so far been satisfactorily explained. For, from the time of Asoka Buddhism had shared with Brahminism the privilege of being one of the main religions of India, but while Jainism that had never assumed the character of a popular religion has survived to our own day, Buddhism, for some inexplicable reason, has completely disappeared in the land of its birth after having flourished here for about 1400 years and spread to all regions east of India; and this in a country noted for its traditional toleration and respect for all religions.

Several reasons have been advanced by historians and others to explain this enigma but none has been very convincing. One of the main causes thus favoured of the learned is that Buddhism had become corrupt and the monasteries, under Tantric influence had degenerated into dens of vice. This does not appear correct. Neither Huien Tsang's nor I-Ching's accounts show that there was such widespread penetration of Tantric cults into monasteries, and both these men were reliable in their estimate of Buddhism. And it is not likely that Tantric rites assumed epidemic forms and corrupted the whole country within a century after I-Ching's departure; further, Tantric rites dominated Brahminism in many parts of India and it cannot be argued that the same practices while degenerating Buddhism elevated Brahminism.

Another explanation is that the monasteries under royal patronage became wealthy and the monks indolent. This, to some extent, is correct; but medieval India has always thought the needs of gods and their ministers greater than those of ordinary humans, and when the Muslims came to India they found the wealth of the

country, especially in northern India, concentrated in a few temples, and priests were generally more powerful than kings.

Whatever might have been the reasons, in each political upheaval of ancient India Buddhism seems to have lost ground steadily to Brahminism. After the collapse of the Mauryan empire, India regenerated under its Hindu king Samudra Gupta. The Hun invasion that came on the wake of the disruption of the Guptan empire, further strengthened Hinduism, and Mihirakula was an ardent Shaiva. Again, Harsha who restored order in the north after the Hun invasion started as a zealous Hindu though later he inclined to Buddhism under Huien Tsang's influence. Huien Tsang's accounts clearly indicate the decay of Buddhism in the north and west due, no doubt, to the Hun invasion. "In Gandhara there were only a few Buddhists: more than a thousand monasteries stood untenanted and the Buddha's sacred Bowl had vanished. In Takshasila the monasteries were numerous but desolate; in Kashmir the people followed a mixed faith. Only in Udayana (Afghanistan) was Buddhism held in high esteem. In Sind the monks were numerous but indolent." Kanauj, even in spite of Harsha's patronage, had only 100 Buddhist monasteries but two hundred Brahmanic temples.

When the regular history of India opens with the Muslim invasions under Mohammad Ghazni and Ghorî, in the 11-12th centuries of the Christian era, we find the Rajputs strong in northern India; they were full-blooded Hindus claiming to be Kshatriyas, had revived the martial traditions of the caste and taken as their models the heroes of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and claimed to be descendents of the ancient solar and lunar dynasties of kings. Buddhism was nowhere in the picture except in East India in Tantric forms scarcely distinguishable from Hinduism.

Another peculiarity of later Buddhism in India was that to all outward appearances Brahminism and Buddhism

were losing their distinctive features and were tending to become similar in popular estimation. The Buddhist ideal of Ahimsa had obtained respectability among the Hindus, and though the Kshatriyas revived the ancient martial spirit of the Indo-Aryans, Brahmins had become Buddhist in their outlook as far as killing was concerned, and their example was followed by other respectable classes especially the Vaisyas to whom Jainism and Vaishnavism made a great appeal. Buddhism, on its part, adopted many of the practices of Brahminism. In Kashmir monks started marrying as early as the sixth century; image worship had become common. Though the Buddha had obtained Nirvana and as such was unable to help the devout, yet worship of his images was considered meritorious; further Mahayana theology produced, as we have seen, living Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the type of the gods of the Hindu pantheon, and these were able to help the devotees in their material and spiritual needs. Bathing of images, and offering flowers and fruits to them became as much part of Buddhist ritual as of Hindu. I-Ching's justification of these pious activities is characteristically Brahminic. "The meaning of the Truths is so profound that it is beyond the comprehension of vulgar minds while the ablution of the holy images is practicable for all. Though the Great Teacher has entered Nirvana, yet his image exists and we should worship it with zeal as though in his presence. Those who constantly offer incense and flowers to it are enabled to purify their thoughts and those who perpetually bathe his image are enabled to overcome sins that involve them in darkness." A good deal of magic, spells and charms, generally associated with Brahminic worship became part of Buddhist worship too, and some of the Buddhist monks were reputed wizards able to drive out evil spirits and confer benefits, both material and spiritual, on their clients. Huiyen Tsang mentions that "worshippers used to throw flowers and silk scarves at the image of Avalokita and draw auguries from them." He himself had drawn

similar auguries from the relics of the Buddha and from his supposed shadows, and claimed to have received knowledge of the future of his pilgrimage and his possible rebirths in celestial regions.

All this tended to make Hinduism and Buddhism similar in the eyes of the common people whatever might have been the differences that existed among the learned. Even the learned were aware of the similarity; for the *Lankavatara Sutra*, as we have seen, while criticising some of the philosophical schools of Hinduism takes the trouble of explaining why Mahayana Buddhism was showing close resemblance to Brahminism.

#### SANKARA AND KUMARILA BHATTA

According to Indian tradition Buddhism was driven out of India by the philosophers Sankara and Kumarila Bhatta who lived in the 8th century A. D. It would appear Buddhism fell in India by the very love of learning it fostered under the aegis of institutions like Nalanda. We have seen, in the previous chapter, that learning was held in greater esteem than right living. Monks usually lived in palatial buildings, and the more learned did not care to go on their begging rounds; the food collected by those who actually went as a matter of routine was given to cattle or to the poor and the monks themselves dined well in the monastery.

But all loved to parade their learning, and the most satisfactory method of establishing the truth of a doctrine was considered to be by victory in a public disputation. We have seen that the Lokayata who challenged the monks of Nalanda offered his head as the price of defeat, and Huien Tsang, in imitation, offered his own in the debate held under Harsha. There was an alternative; an establishment or a sect could choose a representative and in a bilateral debate the defeated disputant was to forfeit his convictions and become the disciple of the victor with all

his following and his material possessions. It was this type of stake that was favoured of Sankara.

Sankara was a brilliant intellectual from Kerala with a flair for polemics. He was a gifted man with an exceptional command of Sanskrit which made him easily the greatest disputant of his age. An ardent Shaiva, he was a Vedantin who advocated uncompromising monism or Advaita, and was eager to challenge any one who cared to disagree with him. He embarked upon a regular campaign of wordy warfare and travelled throughout India, challenging every institution he wished to convert, annexing temples, monasteries, Mutts and their property, somewhat like an intellectual Alexander. His campaigns extended from Kalady, his birth place, to Kashmir, from Orissa to Baluchistan. Buddhism went down before this onslaught along with many rival schools of Hindu philosophy, and most of the Buddhist shrines in India were converted into Hindu temples and the symbols of the Three Jewels were either removed or given new garbs and names.

Sankara's Brahmin enemies called him a Buddhist in disguise. His Advaita is scarcely distinguishable from Nagarjuna's Sunya, and he was a vegetarian and an advocate of Ahimsa. Sankara is believed to have died young.

The other adversary of Buddhism, Kumarila Bhatta was a Brahmin of Bihar who first became a convert to Buddhism and then left it to rejoin Brahminism. Though less gifted than Sankara, he too was an able disputant and made up by zeal what he lacked in intellect. He is said to have instigated a king named Suddhanavan to actively persecute the Buddhists and exterminate them. How far this is correct is not known; for Suddhanavan exists only in legend and if at all there was such a king his kingdom was neither extensive nor important.

Anyway after the epoch of Sankara and Kumarila Bhatta Buddhism may be said to have disappeared in most of the countries in India except Bengal. The Pala kings of Bengal, no doubt, extended their patronage to Buddhism, and the contacts of Tibet were generally with Bengal. We hear of regular missions from Tibet to Bengal, and Vikramasila and Odantapuri under Pala kings became famous centres of learning; Nalanda seems to have disappeared with the campaigns of Sankara and Kumarila Bhatta and the Muslim invasion that followed. The efflorescence of Buddhism under the Palas was the last glow of a dying flame.

#### THE MUSLIM INVASION

The death blow to Buddhism in India was dealt by the Muslim invasion. With the arrival of the Muslims, the cultural history of India enters a new phase. From the time of the Indo-Aryans there were numerous invasions of India by aliens but all the invaders who settled down in India were culturally conquered by India and were absorbed in her comprehensive religious and socio-religious synthesis. The reason for this is not far to seek. None of these invaders had a clear cut religion but all had accepted the leadership of India in religion. But the Muslims were different; they brought with them a fierce monotheism which permitted of no compromise with image worshippers. Moreover it had definite dogmas derived from Judaism, and a firm belief in the superiority of human life which precluded all leanings towards metempsychosis. In Indian religions, on the other hand, the idea of a personal God is weak, idolatry common, transmigration of souls the central theme, and all beliefs when pursued by metaphysicians tended towards pantheism. The two could not mix and the fight was bitter and prolonged and ended in the division of India into Pakistan and Hindustan in the year 1947.

The Muslim conquest spelt greater disaster for Buddhism than for Hinduism. Not that the Muslims had anything discriminating against Buddhism; in fact to them both Hinduism and Buddhism looked alike, and the early Muslim invaders thought it their duty to destroy idols and shrines wherever they found them. But while revived Hinduism could stand the blow, Buddhism, already tottering under the onslaught of Hinduism, went down before it.

In the eleventh century of the Christian era, Mahmud of Ghazni, known in Indian legend as the Idol Breaker, made no less than seventeen predatory campaigns into India and drained practically all the wealth of the Panjab, Doab and Western India. At first he met with some resistance; later Mohammad's expeditions took the form of winter sports. Every year he started with his horsemen in the month of October and after plundering whichever kingdom or temples he wanted returned home to Ghazni in Spring. Mohammad, however, had no territorial ambitions and was content with plunder and destruction of Hindu shrines and kingdoms. With his death in 1030, India enjoyed some respite after which Mohammad Ghori started the invasion of India in right earnest. Unlike Ghazni, Ghori came to rule India and not merely to plunder, and left his general Kutub-ud-din Aibek in Delhi to look after and consolidate his conquests. After the death of Ghori in 1206, Kutub assumed independent sovereignty and extended his conquests. And wherever Islam spread, Hinduism was subdued and Buddhism disappeared.

After the Muslim conquest of India, Buddhism lingered in East India for some time and in due course it got so mixed up with Tantric Hinduism that the two became almost indistinguishable. Not only Buddhist shrines and images received Hindu names and garbs but the Buddha himself was accorded a niche in the Hindu pantheon as an incarnation of Vishnu. This appearance of Vishnu as the Buddha who had taught heretical doctrines were

explained in Hindu scriptures by the curious statement that it was a deliberate attempt by the deity to mislead the wicked so that their utter degeneration and helplessness might make them seek the help of Brahmins.

Anyway, the Musim conquest put an end to the cultural expansion of India. From now on Indian culture was on the defensive, and its greatest struggle was to preserve its ancient religions, social institutions, art and literature. The Central Asian regions came under Muslim sway and Buddhism here was replaced by Islam. Travel between India and China became difficult and the great age of Chinese pilgrims ended. Cultural commerce between Tibet and East India continued for some time, but with the conquest of Bengal by Muslims even this link was broken. On the Himalayan borders of India, Buddhism lingered as part of Tibetan Lamaism and this is the only vestige left of Buddhism in India at present.

#### WAR BETWEEN SOUTH INDIA AND INDONESIA

The sea routes were also disturbed by the expansion of Arab seafaring under Islam. This was greatly facilitated by a hundred years' war between the Cholas and the Sri Vijaya empire of Java-Sumatra, which weakened both these maritime empires whose ships had the practical monopoly of trade in the Indian ocean east of Ceylon.

Towards the close of the tenth century, the ancient kingdom of Chola expanding its borders emerged as a great naval power. At first the relation between the Cholas and the Sri Vijayas was cordial. In 1005, the Sri Vijaya emperor built at Nagapatanam in the territory of the Cholas, a Buddhist shrine named after him as Chulamanivarmadeva Vihara mainly for the benefit of Sri Vijaya trading nationals resident in the Chola kingdom. The Chola king Rajaraja greatly appreciated this gift, and endowed it with the revenues of a whole village. "Like an earlier Nalanda endowment (by Sri Vijaya) the



Negapatam one was established to provide a place where the merchants of Sri Vijaya could resort to worship in accordance with their own religious tenets. It witnesses to the importance of trading connection between Palembang and the Coromandel Coast, which drove a flourishing trade in Indian piece-goods with South-East Asia."

After the death of Sri Chulamanivarmadeva, the relation between the Cholas and Sri Vijaya became strained for reasons that are not known. Towards the end of the first decade of the eleventh century, the Cholas started naval raids on the possessions of Sri Vijaya; the name of the king of the latter at the time was Sumatrabhumi. The Chola king Rajaraja was eminently successful in these raids and he mentions in an inscription that he conquered no less than 12,000 islands of the eastern and western seas. These naval expeditions continued under Rajendra Chola and in the year 1025, the Cholas inflicted a severe defeat on Sri Vijaya and an interesting inscription of 1031 by Rajendra Chola records his victory over Sri Vijaya. The inscription reads as under: "Rajendra, having despatched many ships over the rolling sea and made captive Sangrama Vijayottunga Varman, king of Kadaram and having captured the elephants in his glorious army took possession of the treasures that king had accumulated; he captured the arch called Vidyadhara Torana at the war gate of the capital of the extensive Sri Vijaya, with the bejewelled wicket gate; also Pannani with perennial waters at its bathing ghats; the ancient Malaiyur with the strong mountain for its rampart; Mayuridingam, surrounded by the deep sea as by a moat; Ilangasoka, undaunted in fierce battles; Mappapalam having abundant deep water for its defence; Mevilimbangam guarded by beautiful walls; Valiappandaru possessed of Valiappanduru; Talaitakkolam praised by the learned; the great Tamralinga capable of strong action in dangerous battles; Ilamurideam, whose fierce strength

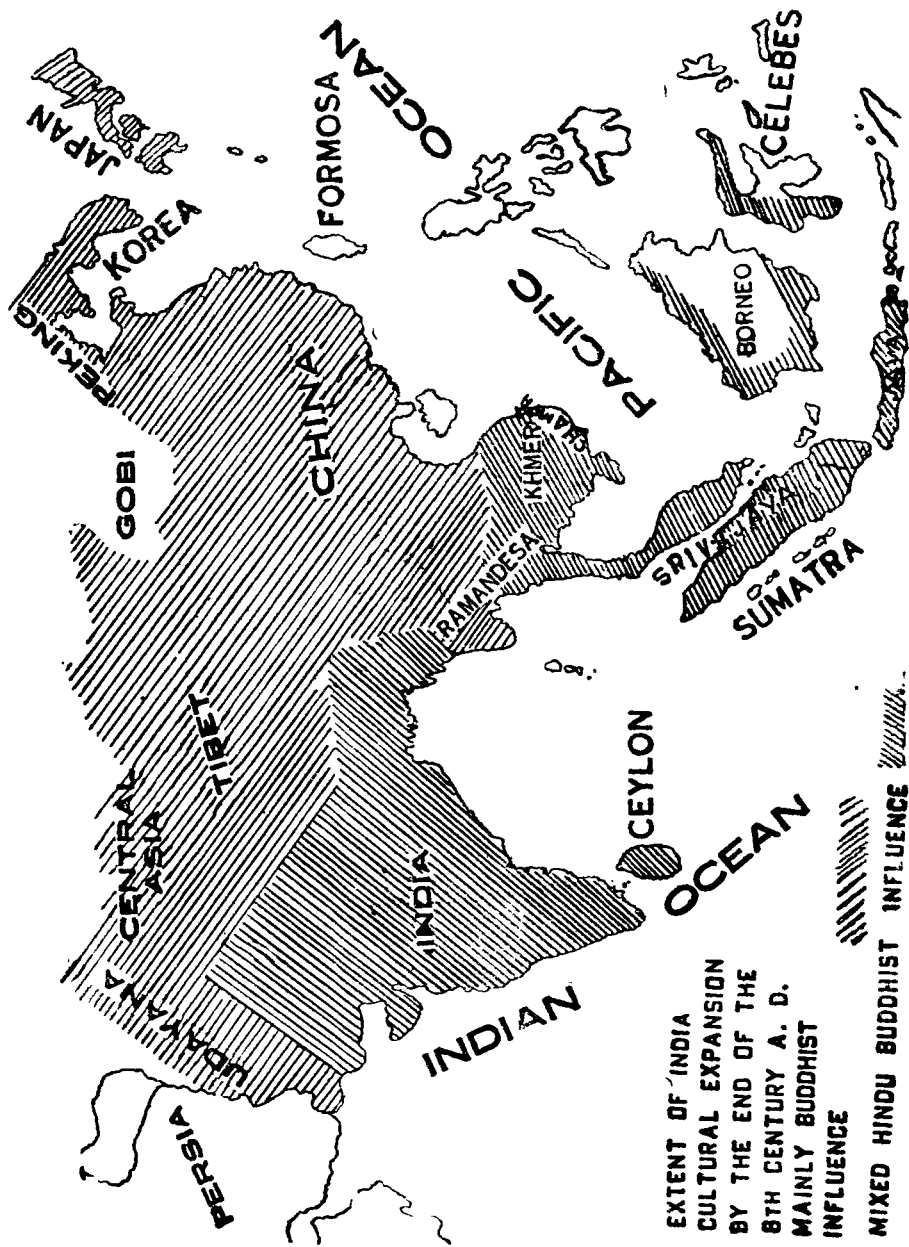
rose in war; the great Nakkavaram in whose extensive gardens honey was collected."

All these places were situated in Sumatra, Malaya and the adjoining regions and most of them have been identified. Though Rajendra's inscription, like those of most of the ancient kings who were not particularly noted for their modesty, tends to exaggerate his might, it is clear that his conquests were extensive; he did not, however, occupy Sri Vijaya but was content to bring the king captive to India and claim a nominal suzerainty over his kingdom. But the kings who succeeded to the Sri Vijaya title after the capture of Sangrama Vijayottunga Varman (who was actually the king of Sri Vijaya and not merely of Kadaram or Kedah as he was styled in the inscription) were reluctant to accept this claim of Chola overlordship, and in 1068 another naval expedition dethroned the reigning king of Sri Vijaya, and a dignitary named Vira Rajendra occupied the throne who owed allegiance to the Cholas. The Chola hold on Sri Vijaya was, however, neither strong nor permanent. It led to interminable conflicts between the two naval powers into which the Pandyan kingdom and Ceylon were eventually dragged. Records of these naval wars between the maritime kingdoms of South India and the island colonies in the east are meagre; the Sinhalese chronicle *Cula Vamsa* mentions two unsuccessful attempts made by king Chandrabhanu of Sri Vijaya to conquer Ceylon in the thirteenth century; in these attempts Chandrabhanu is said to have been helped by the Cholas and the Pandyans. The allies, however, seem to have fallen out; for an inscription of Vira Pandyan records that in 1264 he captured and killed the king of Chavaka or Java.

Anyway, these long drawn out naval conflicts between South Indian kingdoms and kings of Java and Sumatra weakened both and paved the way for the Arab supremacy of the Indian Ocean. When Marco Polo visited the

ports of the islands and of South India in the thirteenth century, Muslims had already established themselves in these regions and were successfully competing with indigenous shipping interests. Soon after, Indonesia passed into Muslim sphere of influence, and the old Hindu kingdoms started receding into the interior. The Europeans completed what the Arabs had started, and with the arrival of the Portugese and their successors, the mastery of the Indian seas passed into their hands, and Indian ships had to confine their activities to the coastal trade of the Peninsula. With this disruption of shipping activities, the link between India and her colonies was finally severed, and, memory being short, South East Asia became a strange land to India. And only now historians and archaeologists have begun to unravel the forgotten past of Indian colonial expansion to regions in the east.







**PART II**

**INDIAN CULTURAL EXPANSION**



## CHAPTER XV

### CEYLON

THE close proximity of the island of Ceylon to the mainland of India has made it culturally, and to some extent politically, a part of India. Her cultural affinities were however mainly with North India; she received Buddhism, which assumed the characteristic of a national religion, direct from Magadha in Asoka's time; but her political history is closely linked with that of the three kingdoms of South India, namely, Chola, Pandyan and Chera. From the conquest of Ceylon by prince Vijaya in the sixth century B. C. till the island passed under the British, the political history of Ceylon had been a continuous struggle against Tamil aggression; several times the Tamils invaded and occupied a good part of the island, only to be driven back. But the Tamil conquests had been so frequent and at times so successful that Tamil influence and nationals came to stay in Ceylon and with these, the bitterness of centuries of conflict which is even now a prominent feature of the politics of Ceylon.

We have a rich legendary lore about cultural origins in Ceylon, both from Indian and Sinhalese sources. The main theme of the *Ramayana*, as is well known, is the war between Rama, prince of Ayodhya, and Ravana, king of Ceylon. In this epic the original inhabitants of Ceylon are mentioned as Rakshasas, warlike cannibals, great builders and tough fighters whose activities extended to South India right up to the Vindhya hills. Ravana himself is mentioned as a skilled warrior, a good strategist and the possessor of an aerial car called Pushpaka; his fortresses and defence systems in Lanka were considered the wonder of the age, and his army often proved more than a match for Rama and his ill-assorted collection of monkeys, birds and bears.

In the Sinhalese chronicles, the original inhabitants of Ceylon are mentioned as Yakshas, naked, ferocious



cannibals who had not, however, developed the technique of war as the Rakshasas. Though both Indian and Sinhalese accounts show a love of the marvellous, the latter are less given to flights of poetic fancy than the former, and less misleading. Besides, the author of the *Ramayana* had a special reason for magnifying the prowess of the Rakshasas; for then only he could project the might of Rama into greater relief.

#### CONQUEST OF CEYLON BY VIJAYA

Setting aside the sacred literature of both India and Ceylon, the Veddas may be said to be the descendants of the original inhabitants of Ceylon. According to Buddhist tradition, both Indian and Sinhalese, the civilizer of the island was Vijaya, a prince of North India. In spite of the myths and legends that have risen round this ancient adventurer it is certain that he was a historical personage. The exact place of his birth is not known, but he is said to have been born under an evil star which made him do unconventional things. Fortunately for Vijaya, but unfortunately for his country, there were many men born under the same star at the time, and the prince became the leader of a gang of seven hundred men whose activities became intolerable in the land. On this, the king and the citizens caught the prince and his gang, equipped a fleet and, forcing them to board the vessels, left them to drift on the high seas. There were probably some good sailors in the gang, and after much wandering they steered for the island of Ceylon.

Reaching Ceylon, the ships dropped anchor and the men landed. They found the island inhabited by Yakshas who at the time were ruled by a princess. There was some opposition to the landing of the immigrants but the queen of the Yakshas fell in love with Vijaya, whose advent, it appears, had already been prophesied, and she married him. His companions, however, thought that Yakshis would neither make good wives or queens, and

strongly disapproved of the marriage, and rejected the advances of Yakshis. In this predicament Vijaya applied to the Pandyan king for Indian ladies, and the obliging Pandyan sent to Ceylon a contingent of 700 maidens headed by a princess. Vijaya married the princess and his men the maidens. The immigrants now decided to settle down in the island which they called Simhala (of the lion) because Vijaya claimed descent from a princess who had a lion for companion.

This is not history but romance; yet it contains an element of truth. We are, however, on firmer ground when the Ceylonese Chronicles state that the conquest of Ceylon by Vijaya took place soon after the Buddha's Parinirvana. For historians now consider that Ceylon was conquered by Vijaya in the sixth century B. C.

In spite of the matrimonial alliances with the Tamils, the settlers looked to North India for cultural inspiration; their original home was in the north, their dialect (the mother of the present Sinhalese language) was a form of Prakrit, regular sailings between Ceylon and the North Indian ports of Bharakaccha (Broach) and Tamralipti made commerce easy, and the Sinhalese settlers for some centuries kept active contact with their mother country. The rise of the Mauryan empire and Asoka's zeal for evangelizing foreign lands forged closer ties between Ceylon and North India. The Sinhalese king Devanampiya Tissa who ascended the throne in 245 B. C. despatched diplomatic and cultural missions to Asoka, and was a friend of this emperor.

#### ASOKA AND THE MISSION OF MAHENDRA

The religion of Vijaya and his men was probably Hinduism: they had, no doubt, heard of the Buddha but since Buddhism before Asoka was little known outside East India, it is doubtful if Vijaya and his firebrands had come under its mild doctrines. Anyway the fame of

Chandragupta and Asoka had reached Ceylon and Tissa, immediately after his coronation, sent a complimentary mission to Asoka bearing treasures. This mission had at least one Brahmin in it. Asoka returned the Sinhalese envoys loaded with gifts "consisting of royal insignia"; the message he sent to Tissa was characteristic of the emperor; after mentioning that he had taken refuge in the Law of the Buddha he advised Tissa to do likewise.

The Mauryan emperor's gifts and advice were so valued by Tissa that he was crowned again. Further, he assumed, like Asoka, the title of Devanampiya (beloved of the gods). Soon he received a religious mission, headed by the celebrated Mahendra; he was the first foreign missionary in recorded history and the real founder of Buddhism in Ceylon, and some detailed notice of this celebrity is necessary here. There are two different traditions, the Indian and the Sinhalese, concerning Mahendra.

According to Sinhalese accounts, Asoka had a wild youth and, when he was viceroy of Ujjain during his father's reign, fell in love with a lady named Devi, daughter of a merchant of Vedisagiri (near modern Bhopal) and had by her a son named Mahendra and a daughter Sanghamitra. Devi stayed with Asoka during his viceroyalty in Ujjain; on Bindusara's death when Asoka went to Pataliputra, the lady, however, decided to stay back in her father's home, though the children were taken by the father to the capital.

Mahendra grew up in the palace at Pataliputra but from very boyhood showed a religious bent of mind. On coming of age he became a monk and Sanghamitra a nun.

According to the Indian tradition, Mahendra was a younger brother of Asoka. He was, it would appear, a dissolute youth whose name became a byword in the city for loose living. The objectionable activities of the prince becoming intolerable the citizens complained to Asoka.

The emperor instituted enquiries and the charges against Mahendra were proved; the offences were found to be of such a serious nature as to deserve capital punishment. Asoka now sent for his brother and said: "If I have you executed as you very well deserve, the curse of my ancestors will be upon my head; on the other hand, if you are let free, the citizens will think ill of me for miscarriage of justice. Anyway, I give you seven days to mend your ways and shall pronounce final judgement at the end of the week".

Asoka had Mahendra shut up in a cell, and as each day passed the sentinel called out to the prisoner that his life had been shortened by a day. The fear of approaching death profoundly affected the royal sinner. He gave himself up to intense meditation on the mutability of life and when Asoka came to see him on the seventh day, Mahendra had already become an Arhat. The penitent told his brother that he abhorred the worldly life and wished to repair to the Himalayaś. Asoka, however, requested him to stay back and be a guide and leader to the Sangha; Mahendra agreed to this and a monastery was built on the palace grounds for his residence; as a monk he was expected to beg for food which he was allowed to do within the palace precincts.

Mahendra now took to religion with all the zeal he had erstwhile shown for vice. He studied the scriptures so thoroughly that he was able to repeat the whole Tripitaka by heart, which stood him in good stead in Ceylon where he is reputed to have transmitted the whole text orally to his disciples.

Asoka, as we have noticed, sent out several religious missions to foreign lands, and the mission to Ceylon was headed by Mahendra. This favoured choice speaks abundantly for the close amity that existed between Tissa and Asoka. The mission consisted of six monks besides Mahendra. In those days the regular mode of travel

between Ceylon and Magadha was by sea, and the Sinhalese accounts say that Mahendra preferred the overland route as he wished to see his mother in Vedisagiri. The more probable reason is that he wished to preach Buddhism in South India. Anyway, he visited Vedisagiri, and the origin of the celebrated stupa at Sanchi is traced to him.

From Vedisagiri, Sinhalese chronicles tell us, the missionaries flew 'like swans' into Ceylon. The Indian tradition, which was current at the time of the Chinese pilgrims, mentions that he went on foot. It would appear that Mahendra visited the kingdoms of South India and founded many Viharas in the Tamil country; for Huiyen Tsang mentions shrines in the Pandyan kingdom attributed to Mahendra and extant in his time. The Sinhalese, who had developed a traditional hostility against the Tamils by the time their chronicles were compiled, were obviously reluctant to admit that the Apostle to Ceylon came by way of the hated Tamil country.

Whichever way the missionaries reached Ceylon, they were given a warm welcome by Tissa and his people. Mahendra is said to have put Tissa on an intelligence test in order to ascertain the king's ability to comprehend the higher law; the king passed the excruciating test, on which he was initiated into the mysteries of the Abhidhamma by Mahendra. In Anuradhapura, the capital of Tissa, Mahendra addressed a public gathering of 40,000 men. The sermon was not, however, on the lines of the edicts of Asoka whose extensive experience of life had made him tolerant of many human weaknesses; Mahendra was a monk, at best a penitent zealot, and his first sermon in Ceylon was couched in the language of a prophet predicting doom; the terrors of hell formed the main theme of the sermon.

For the residence of Mahendra and his monks, Tissa built a monastery in the Mahavihara garden, and the

members of the Sangha increased. One of the converts to the new faith was the princess Anula. Desiring to renounce the world and become a nun, she approached Mahendra for ordination, but was told that a nun alone could ordain a nun and not a monk. On this, the Sinhalese king sent a mission to Asoka, and the mission returned with no less a personage than Sanghamitra, Mahendra's sister. She did not come alone but brought a cutting of the Bo-tree, which was received with great reverence and ceremonially planted. The panel at Sanchi, showing a tree being transported, is believed to represent the despatch of the cutting to Ceylon. The cutting took root, and like Buddhism itself, has grown in strength and is at present shown to travellers as the oldest tree in the island.

The Mahavihara founded by Mahendra became one of the celebrated centres of Buddhism in the world. The Sinhalese genius for originality in religion or philosophy has never been very great, but they have proved themselves the best preservers of tradition. When alien cults and strange theories began to corrupt Buddhism, it was to Mahavihara that the Buddhist world looked for orthodoxy and guidance, and many scholars, saints and pilgrims of foreign lands have visited this celebrated centre of learning where the Pitakas were preserved in their original purity.

Devanampiya sent another mission to Pataliputra in search of relics, and the mission is said to have returned with the almsbowl of the Buddha. The bowl was housed in a Dagoba, still extant under the name of Thuparama Dagoba. Tissa is credited with having built several shrines, and is generally considered the first patron of Buddhism in Ceylon.

#### CEYLON AND SOUTH INDIA

This important king in Indo-Sinhalese history died in 207 B. C. and soon after, the kingdom was invaded by

Tamils. A descendant of Tissa, by name Duttagamini, rallied Sinhalese nationalism by his intensive patronage of Buddhism, and succeeded in driving out the Tamils. From now on Buddhism came to be looked upon as the national religion of Ceylon, and Brahminism, which was followed by the Tamil settlers, as something of an alien creed. Duttagamini is celebrated in Sinhalese tradition as the builder of Lchapasada or Copper Palace and the Mahathupa or Ruwanweli Dagoba. The former was a noble edifice, nine storeys high, with copper roofing; it was a monastery with accommodation for several hundred monks, each storey set apart for monks of differing degrees of learning and saintliness. When the foundation stone of Ruwanweli Dagoba was laid, it is related distinguished guests came from Kashmir and other regions of India, and wealthy merchants from distant Alexandria.

Though the Sinhalese were not given much to sectarian quarrels, the first century of the Christian era was marked by the rise of Abhayagiri monastery as a rival to Mahavihara. The doctrinal differences between the two centres were not great, but the feelings were, each one trying to win for itself the patronage of the king and nobles. When Fa Hien visited the island in 412 A. D. the Abhayagiri monastery seems to have been more important than the Mahavihara, for, according to the pilgrim, Abhayagiri had 5,000 monks against 3,000 of Mahavihara.

Soon after the departure of Fa Hien Buddhaghosha arrived in Ceylon. This event may be said to mark the second important milestone in Indo-Ceylonese relations. Buddhaghosha's activities in Ceylon have been already mentioned in Chapter XII, and need not be repeated here.

From the sixth century to the eleventh, Sinhalese history is a long tale of bloody wars with the South Indian kingdoms in which the Sinhalese seem to have suffered

continued defeats. In the eighth century things took so serious a turn that the Sinhalese were obliged to abandon Anuradhapura and change the capital to Pollannaruva. In the year 1071, the Sinhalese king Vijaya Bahu, however, managed to organise all Ceylon against the invaders and wage successful wars with the Tamils. He recovered Anuradhapura. His successor Parakrama Bahu (1153-86), considered the greatest king in Ceylonese history, consolidated his power, and started an era of construction of religious shrines and of irrigational projects.

Vijaya Bahu, after having driven out the Tamils attended to the affairs of religion. But Buddhism had suffered badly during the preceding centuries of Tamil invasions and civil wars, and Vijaya Bahu could find no qualified Theras in Ceylon. The succession having thus been interrupted, he seems to have imported learned monks from Burma. Parakrama Bahu continued the good work of his predecessor and convened a synod at Anuradhapura to fix doctrine and canon. The synod upheld the orthodoxy of Mahavihara. Parakrama Bahu was however no fanatic; though an ardent Buddhist, like all good Buddhist and Hindu kings, he patronised the religions of all his subjects and his munificence extended to Brahmins too and he built several temples in his capital for their use.

Soon after Parakrama Bahu's reign, the Tamils again invaded Ceylon. This time they had come to stay, and were never completely dislodged from the island. The country was divided into several kingdoms and the northern regions remained under Tamil dominance. The island regained its unity only after the British occupation.

Though Parakrama Bahu II, in the thirteenth century, had regained the sacred tooth from the Tamils who had taken it away from Ceylon during the political upheavals that followed the reign of Parakrama Bahu I, Buddhism never again regained its original importance but had to



share its domain with Hinduism. But in Burma and Siam, the Buddhism of Ceylon was still held the model of orthodoxy and scholars from these countries regularly visited Ceylon for study and ordination.

#### LEGEND OF THE TOOTH

The Portugese arrived in Ceylon in 1505, and in their zeal for expanding their colonial possessions and their religion, captured practically the whole island with the exception of Kandly which remained independent. A good many Sinhalese, especially in the coastal regions, accepted Christianity. In the beginning of the seventeenth century the Dutch came on the scenc and in the struggle for empire among European nations, the island along with India finally fell to the British.

Apart from the Tamils of Ceylon who have their roots in India, the island cherishes two treasured relics as visible symbols of its age long link with India. One is the Bo-tree, already mentioned; the other is the tooth of the Buddha, on which Ceylon's national sentiments have always centred. The Sinhalese believe in an ancient prophesy that the island would always remain safe as long as the relic remained in her possession, but her doom would be at hand if it passed out of Ceylon. As such a brief account of the legend of the tooth would be of interest to us.

According to Sinhalese tradition, four teeth and three bones of the Buddha did not form part of the relics that were divided among the clans of East Asia at the time of the cremation of the Buddha's body. A sage named Khema, it would appear, took the left canine tooth from the pyre and gave it to the king of Kalinga who was on the spot; this king took it to his capital and enshrined it in a glorious shrine and the city was renamed Dantapuri or the City of the Tooth. The possession of this tooth enhanced the fame

of Dantapuri, and neighbouring kings cast covetous eyes on it. The tooth was considered something of a talisman, and many kings warred on Kalinga for the possession of the tooth. The kings of Kalinga thus found themselves involved in constant wars with their neighbours, and Guhasiva, a pious king who reigned in the fourth century A. D. decided to part with it as the relic caused the country more harm than good. Hence he entrusted the tooth to his daughter and her husband and sent them by ship to Ceylon.

The tooth was received ceremoniously in Ceylon and a special shrine known as Dhammachakka was built for its reception. The Orissan shrine of the relic is believed to be Jagannath Puri which, by all accounts, was a Buddhist shrine converted for Brahmanic worship when Buddhism was driven out of India.

Anyway, the tooth was in Ceylon when Fa Hien visited the island and the pilgrim describes the annual festival of the tooth during which it was exposed for public veneration in the Abhayagiri monastery. The cult of the tooth had thus been established in Ceylon in very early times. During the political disturbances that rent the island from time to time, the relic was taken from place to place, and early in the fourteenth century it was carried off by Tamils to South India from where it was regained by Parakrama Bahu II.

The Portugese invasion led to some curious consequences. In 1560 Dom Constantino de Braganza, Portugese Viceroy of Goa led an expedition against Jaffna and took the city when a relic, described as "the tooth of an ape mounted in gold", was found in a temple and carried off to Goa. News got round that it was actually the famous tooth of the Buddha and Bayin Naung, king of Pegu, offered an enormous sum to the Portugese as ransom to redeem it. The secular authorities at Goa were

tempted to accept the offer, but the clergy and the Inquisition forbade it; further, the Archbishop of Goa took the tooth, pounded it in a mortar before the viceregal court, burnt the power and scattered the ashes over the Arabian Sea.

The Sinhalese now heard of Bayin Naung's interest in the relic. The king of Cotta, a worthy by name Don Juan Dharmapala, sent an embassy to Bayin Naung to inform him in confidence that what the Portuguese had destroyed in Goa was a false tooth and the real one was with him which he was prepared to give Bayin Naung for a consideration. The king of Pegu was interested. He wished not only to buy the tooth but to cement Sinhalese-Burman friendship by matrimony and sent an embassy with a large sum to buy off the tooth and a Sinhalese princess. The embassy accordingly procured the relic and a beautiful Sinhalese lady who, Dharmapala averred, was his only daughter.

On receipt of the tooth, the king of Pegu installed it in a fitting shrine and married the Sinhalese princess. Soon after, he received an embassy from the king of Kandy; the Kandyan ambassadors informed Bayin Naung that Don Juan Dharmapala was not a real king, that he had no daughters and, what was worse, the tooth he sold to Pegu was false. The emissaries added that the real tooth of the Buddha was neither the one destroyed at Goa nor the one sold by Dharmapala, but was actually in the possession of the king of Kandy; this person was now prepared to sell it to Bayin Naung, and was, furthermore, a real king and had legitimate daughters one of whom he was prepared to send to Pegu to be married to Bayin Naung.

The king of Pegu had, by now, enough of Sinhalese relics and ladies. So he entertained the Kandyan ambassadors with ostentatious courtesy, politely declined the offer of the tooth and the princess and sent them back.

Hence the tooth at Kandy remained where it was but its authenticity was held in doubt; in 1592 however, when Vimala Dharma re-established the succession of the original Sinhalese dynasty, the tooth at Kandy was officially declared authentic.

#### SINHALESE ART AND RELIGION

In art and architecture, Ceylon had generally followed the lead of India, modified, no doubt, by indigenous genius. Amaravati is considered the inspiring source of early Sinhalese art, and the frescoes at Sigiriya show close affinity to Ajanta. The exuberance of Dravidian styles was not copied by Ceylon, and its art like its religion favoured simpler styles.

With the decay of Buddhism in India, the cultural contact of Ceylon was mainly with Burma, Siam and Cambodia and these four countries formed a single unit of Hinayana Buddhism with Pali Canon as the scriptures. In the 17th century when Vimala Dharma II wished to re-establish Buddhism in Ceylon on firm ground, he found that true succession in the island had failed and it was to Burma that he applied for competent priests; Burma, at the time, was found scarcely better, and it was Siam that supplied ten monks and an abbot named Upali to regenerate Sinhalese Buddhism. And it is interesting to note that the existing orders in Ceylon derive their sanction from Burmese and Siamese sources, though at one time Ceylon was considered the leading light of southern Buddhism.

The major part of the population of Ceylon at present may be said to be the descendants of Vijaya and of his men. The Tamils form about a fourth of the entire population. Though the prevailing religions are Buddhism and Hinduism, the cults of the aborigines are mixed up with both. These indigenous cults still have their votaries and their priests are known as Kapuralas whose methods

of exorcism bear close affinity to the Devil Dancing of South India. They have a spirit world of their own though some of its denizens have been given Brahmanic garbs. At Badulla and Ratnapura there are temples dedicated to these spirits. "The chief spirit worshipped at Ratnapura and in most of these temples is Maha Saman, the god of Adams Peak. He is sometimes indentified with Lakshman, the brother of Rama, and sometimes with Indra."

Both Hinduism and Buddhism, as already stated, have shown an accommodating spirit in the matter of accepting into their fold alien beliefs and gods, and in Buddhist shrines in Ceylon may be found images of Hindu deities and Maha Saman. Vishnu is particularly popular in Sinhalese Buddhist temples; for he is not considered a rival "but as a very reverent admirer of the Buddha anxious to befriend good Buddhists".

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## CHAPTER XVI

### INDO CHINA

WE have noticed in Chapter VI that Indian overseas expansion to the east started in the early centuries of the Christian era. While the ruling dynasties of most of the countries of South East Asia traced their origin to Indian princes, we have no record as to which country first came under Indian influence. Our main sources of information in this respect are Chinese records and ancient inscriptions found in these regions, and the earliest records so far discovered pertain to Indo-China. This certainly does not mean that Indo China was colonised by Indians before the other countries of South East Asia; the probabilities are that Lower Burma, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra or Java was colonised first, but so far we have not been able to adduce any reliable evidence in support of this.

Anyway, Indo-China may be said to mark the easternmost limit of Indian cultural expansion, the regions north of it coming under the Chinese sphere of cultural influence. In Indo-China, the two civilisations met, as the name signifies, and while Cambodia retains its Indian culture, Viet Nam is essentially Chinese in its cultural inspiration and her Buddhism, along with Taoism and Confucianism, came by way of China.

### FUNAN

Early Chinese records show that about the first century of the Christian era, Indo China was divided into two main kingdoms: Funan and Chen-la. It is not clear whether the two were independent kingdoms or Chen-la was a vassal of Funan. The civilising of Indo-China, as well as the islands farther south, is generally attributed to a mysterious Indian adventurer, Kaundinya by name.

The main dynasties of Cambodia, medieval Champa, and certain kings of Java, Sumatra and Borneo regarded him as their ancestor. This legendary figure is said to have descended from Asvathaman, son of the redoubtable Brahmin warrior Drona of Mahabharata fame.

The earliest account of Kaundinya comes from K'ang T'ai, a Chinese writer who visited Funan in the third century A. D. He says that Funan was, in the beginning, ruled by a queen named Lieou-ye (Willow Leaf). "At that time, there was in the country of Mo-fou, a man named Houen-Chen who worshipped a spirit with devotion," and the spirit gave him a magic bow and asked him to set sail eastward. Houen-Chen did as he was told and his boat reached Funan; Willow Leaf came out with her fleet and gave him battle. Houen-Chen shot an arrow from his magic bow which destroyed the boat in which the queen was sailing and he himself saved her from drowning. On this she fell in love with her erstwhile enemy and married him. Thus Houen-Chen became the master of Funan.

While the facts are more or less the same in all Chinese accounts, the annals of the Tsin dynasty give the name of the bowman as Hun-hui, the Ch'i chronicles as Hun-t'ien, and the Liang annals as Ch'iao-chen-ju. This confusion in names is due to the peculiarities of the Chinese script which presents almost insurmountable difficulties in transliterating proper nouns with no obvious meaning. However, the Sanskrit inscriptions of Mi-son (in Indo China) clearly give the name of the founder of the dynasty as Kaundinya. Chinese accounts of the ancient kingdoms of Java and Sumatra also indicate that kingship in these regions originated with Kaundinya. All this clearly shows that Kaundinya was an extraordinary adventurer who founded a dynasty the sway of whose princes extended from Indo China to Java, Sumatra and Borneo, if not farther.

The precise date of Kaundinya and the identity of the country from which he hailed have not been ascertained. But the fact that the Pallavas of South India traced their origin from Asvathaman, and that the kings of the eastern Colonies, again like the Pallavas, assumed, on coronation, a title ending in the affix 'Varman' together with certain other data furnished by inscriptions indicate that Kaundinya was a scion of the Pallava dynasty, and his migration to the east took place in the first or second century A. D.

Kaundinya brought the elements of civilisation to Funan. Before him the inhabitants of Funan were naked savages and Willow Leaf herself went about naked. This revolted the Indian and he "dressed her in a fold of cloth with a hole through which she passed her head. He also made her do her hair in a knot." Clothing for men was introduced only in the third century A. D. after the visit of K'ang T'ai.

One of Kaundinya's successors, Fan Shihman, was a great conqueror. He extended the frontiers of Funan and reduced ten kingdoms but was killed in action while conducting a campaign against Burma. His successor Fan Chan is reputed to have received an ambassador from India; the identity of the country that sent the ambassador has not yet been established. In the year 240 A. D. however, he sent to India a complimentary mission in return; this mission embarked at the port of Takola in the Malay Peninsula and went by sea up the Ganges to a court believed to be of the Murundas.

K'ang T'ai has left us an account of the people of Funan as he saw them. The kingdom had walled cities and palaces for the king and the nobility. "The inhabitants were ugly, black, frizzy haired, and the men went naked. Their manners were crude, though not given to theft. They practised a primitive kind of agriculture. They enjoyed using the chisel and engraved ornaments. Many of their eating utensils were made of silver. Taxes were



paid in gold, silver, pearls and perfumes. They had also books and depositories of archives. Their writing resembled that of the Hon, a central Asian people using an Indian script." From K'an T'ai's account it would appear that the religion of the people was animism, modified by Hinduism, and of the court Brahminism. It is, however, interesting to note that the first inscription in these regions so far discovered, known as the Vo-Canh inscription (in south Viet Nam) is Buddhistic in inspiration. The inscription is in Sanskrit; its date is considered not later than the third century A. D. and it bears close affinity to the Buddhist inscriptions of Kanheri and Girnar. From this circumstance it is even surmised that Fan Shihman was a patron of Buddhism, if not a Buddhist. The Buddhist pilgrim I-Ching also says that Buddhism prevailed in Indo China in bygone days, that a wicked king destroyed it and in his time (seventh century A. D.) the people of Funan were worshippers of Devas or Brahmanic deities.

#### THE KHMERS

Apart from such stray references, the early history of Indo China is shrouded in mystery. With the rise of the Khmers and Chams, however, we begin to see light. The Khmers are best known to history as the builders of the splendid monuments of Angkor and the ancestors of the present Cambodians. The original kingdom of the Khmers was known to the Chinese as Chen-la. As already stated, it is not clear from Chinese records whether it was an independent state or a vassal of Funan. But the dynasty like that of Funan had an Indian origin. For the Khmers claimed descent from a sage named Kambu to whom Shiva gave for a wife the Apsara Mera. This legend, no doubt, is different from the Kaundinya legend; but with the expansion of Chen-la into the Khmer empire, we find the Khmer kings claiming descent from Kaundinya. This was, in all probability, due to matrimonial relations with the dynasty of Funan. The Khmers were matriarchs, and

the marriage of a Khmer prince with a princess of Funan could give the progeny the claim to the heirship of Funan.

The Khmers were also allied linguistically to the Mons and Tailangs of Lower Burma and to the Khasis of Assam. The Khasis, it may be noted, are matriarchs like the Khmers and the Khmer empire in the heyday of its glory extended into Lower Burma.

The earliest Khmer kings of whom we have authentic record were Bhavavarman and his brother Chitrasena; they seem to have been related to Rudravarman, the king of Funan, but on the latter's death they overthrew Funan and expanded the Khmer kingdom of Chen-la. This happened sometime towards the close of the sixth century or in the beginning of the seventh.

The earliest inscription so far discovered pertaining to the Khmers is of Bhavavarman found at Phnom Banteai Neang. It is in Sanskrit verse "announcing the consecration of a Linga by the king with the aid of riches won by the use of his bow." These early Khmer emperors were ardent Hindus, and Bhavavarman's family priest was a worthy named Somavarman, particularly proficient in *Sama Veda*, who espoused a sister of Bhavavarman. Somavarman is said to have established "images of Trihbuvaanesvara and the Sun, and arranged for the permanent exposition of the *Ramayana*, the *Puranas*, and the entire *Bharata*, copies of which he presented to the temple."

After Bhavavarman, three great emperors appear in Khmer history: Chitrasena (also called Mahavarman), Isanavarman and Jayavarman. During their reign, the conquests of Bhavavarman were consolidated and the frontiers of the empire extended. After Jayavarman, however, the empire seems to have suffered a reverse. For we find Jayavarman II, extolled in Khmer legend and literature as the greatest hero of the race, coming back from exile in Java and restoring the ancient glory of the

Khmers. He reigned in the first half of the ninth century and is credited with extensive conquests and the building of a new capital called Indrapura.

The conquests of Jayavarman II and his power and prestige enhanced the glory of Khmers, and during his time, the Khmer empire was the most dominant in South East Asia. It included the major part of Indo-China, Siam and Lower Burma. The state religion was Brahminism and an elaborate court ceremonial was established with a high priest to superintend over the ceremonies. An inscription commemorates the founding of this sacerdotal family of Cambodia: "Jayavarman, anxious to assure his position as an emperor (Chakravartin), summoned from Janapada a Brahmin called Hiranyadama, learned in magic (Siddhividya), who arranged the rules (Vidhi) for the worship of the Royal God, and taught the king's Chaplain, Sivakaivalya four treatises called Vrah Vinasikha, Nayottara, Sammoha and Siraccheda..... The king made a solemn compact that only the members of his (Sivakaivalya's) maternal family should be Yajakas (sacrificers and officiants)."

The inscription is interesting in many ways. The Khmers were full blooded matriarchs, and the institution had influenced even Brahmins. In India, though we had matriarchal Kshatriya kingdoms, Travancore and Cochin for instance, Brahmins rigidly adhered to the code of Manu. The heir to the throne in Travancore and Cochin was not the reigning Rajah's son but his sister's son agreeable to matriarchal traditions, but the Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala were strict patriarchs. Among the Khmers, as the inscription would show, even Brahmins followed matriarchal descent.

Another interesting feature of Khmer religion was the development of the cult of the Royal God. A king usually identified himself with the god he worshipped and

assumed his name, and in temples the main idol worshipped was the king who was represented with the symbols of the god. Thus, Khmer temples developed into shrines, which were not only places of worship but also national monuments housing the images of deified kings. The cult of the Royal God was however not peculiar to the Khmers but was widely prevalent in most of the countries of South East Asia, especially in Champa, Java and Sumatra.

From Jayavarman II to the reign of Jayavarman VII (1162-1201) the Khmer empire flourished under strong and vigorous rulers. The Khmers were great builders, and Angkor, which was founded by Jayavarman II though not made the capital by him, became famous in South East Asia for its splendid monuments. The Khmers had a double intention in erecting magnificent religious edifices; the idea of constructing a befitting shrine for the god of the empire was one, and that of immortalising the emperor as the Royal God was another. In Khmer court cult, the emperor was, in theory, the embodiment of the god he worshipped and his statue was installed along with that of the deity, usually a Linga, and mystic rites invested the granite statue with the soul or ego of the emperor which thus remained fixed in the image. Thus the shrines of Angkor are, in effect, temples and pyramids combined, and the emperors lavished all their wealth in building these shrines and maintaining their pompous ceremonials.

The first in the great line of Khmer builders was Yasovarman I (889-900) who is considered the real founder of Angkor which was first named after him as Yasodharapura. "His immense building programme included the great reservoir, now the Eastern Baray, and the series of monasteries for the religious sects-Shaivites, Vaishnavites and possibly Buddhists. Yasodharapura, the original city of Angkor, covered a considerably larger area than the later Angkor Thom, founded by Jayavarman VII towards

the end of the twelfth century, with the unique and mysterious Buddhist temple of the Bayon as its central feature."

The last of the great line of Khmer emperors was Jayavarman VII. He reduced the turbulent vassals of the north and reconquered Champa which had been conquered by one of his predecessors Suryavarman, but had revolted and declared its independence. He fortified Angkor Thom and built the Bayon. His empire extended from the South China Sea to the Gulf of Martaban, and his prestige and power were respected by the island kingdoms of the South,

After the death of Jayavarman VII the decline of the Khmer empire set in. The actual cause of the decline is not known, as historical data of the period are meagre. We know for a fact that Champa revolted successfully soon after Jayavarman's death. The Thais, unruly tribes from the north were pushing down and, absorbing Khmer culture, fast building kingdoms in the regions now known as Siam. Soon these Thais established powerful kingdoms able to challenge successfully the supremacy of Khmers in the east and the Burmese on the west. The Annamites too were on the road to expansion and in the ensuing struggle between the Thais, the Chams, the Annamites and the Khmers, the kingdom of Champa disappeared from the map of South East Asia. The Khmer kingdom of Cambodia had a precarious existence as the vassal of Siam or Annam or both and she was saved from the fate that overtook Champa by the effective intervention of the French in these regions in 17-18th century.

#### KHMER RELIGION

The Hinduism transplanted in Cambodia had an interesting growth in its new surroundings. While ceremonial Brahminism was the religion of the upper classes, of the priests and the ruling heirarchy, the

religion of the people remained mainly animism and spirit worship. No doubt, indigenous cults and gods received recognition by Brahminism, and the pompous temple festivals attracted pilgrims from all over the country, but domestic and rural religion was mainly indigenous. South India affords an example of such a dual religious system in Hinduism. The great temples of the south are strongholds of Brahminism and enjoyed royal patronage, but the religion of the generality of the Tamils has, to this day, remained the worship of their ancient deities given Brahmanic garbs.

Caste system could never be enforced rigidly in Cambodia. The reason for this is obvious. Even kings were of mixed blood and Brahmins do not seem to have been better. Further, it would appear that the king, as the Royal God, was held in greater esteem than the Brahmin. The caste system was, however, accepted in theory as the real basis of society, mainly because of the verdict of ancient sages, and the king and the nobles prided themselves on being Kshatriyas, and along with the Brahmins formed an exclusive class if not caste. Sanskrit was the language of this upper class, and most of the inscriptions discovered are in this language, while the few in Khmer language are "half-contemptuous notices to the common people".

The dominant religion of early Khmers was Shaivism. Shiva was worshipped in the form of the Linga and his favourite name was Sri Sikharesvara or Lord of the Peak, agreeable to the Indian conception of his abode on Mount Kailas. The worship of Vishnu was also prevalent and Krishna appears to have been identified with certain local deities. The Naga (snake) cult was specially favoured of early Khmers. The Kaundinya legend, like ceratin Pallava legends of their origin, is inextricably connected with a Nagi named Somi, and a nine-headed Naga occupied a prominent place in Khmer iconography. The Khmer

emperor used to spend the first watch of every night in mystic union with a Nagi, represented by an image or by a beautiful woman transformed into a Nagi by mysterious rites.

The wealth of the country, as in medieval India, was mainly concentrated in temples. "Thousands of villages were assigned for the upkeep of the great temples, and tens of thousands of officiants and hundreds of dancers were employed in their services, not to mention the army of labourers, masons, sculptors and decorators for the construction work." In one of the lesser shrines, the staff consisted, according to an inscription, of "18 chief priests, 2740 minor priests, and 2232 assistants including 615 dancing girls." The villagers who could be rallied to the service of the temple in times of festivals and the consequent need for making special arrangements were put down at the figure of 79,365 including Cham and Burmese slaves. These expensive temples could only be maintained by continued conquests and predatory campaigns, and in times of reverses, the shrines naturally fell into neglect and jungle grew over many of them.

Towards the latter part of Khmer supremacy, Mahayana Buddhism gained considerable strength in the empire. The Tibetan historian Taranatha says that Mahayana was preached in Indo-China (which was known in India and Tibet as the Koki country) by the disciples of Vasubandhu. It must have been strengthened by contact with T'ang China. At first, it would appear, ministers became Buddhists, and the kings encouraged this in order to set off the power of the Brahmins who were tending to become omnipotent. The first Khmer emperor to become Buddhist was Dharanindravarman II, father of Jayavarman VII. This king too was an ardent Buddhist, and "the myriad faces (the Bayon, Angkor) which so impressively and disconcertingly confront the observer are portraits of Jayavarman himself in the guise of the Mahayana Bodhisatva Avalokitesvara."

Anyway, there was no enmity between Buddhism and Hinduism in Cambodia. The Shaivas seem to have considered Buddhism something like Vaishnavism, and both Hinduism and Buddhism got harmoniously blended in Khmer art and ritual. In Hindu shrines were installed images of the members of the Buddhist pantheon, and Brahmins performed Pujas to all images with equal impartiality. In fact the identification of Buddhism and Hinduism became so complete that we find in Cambodia a trinity composed of Paṇḍubhava (Brahma), Ambhojanetra (Vishnu) and the Buddha, "thus showing by implication that Shiva and the Buddha is but one"; the cult of Shiva-Buddha, or the one-ness of Shiva and Buddha was a peculiarity of the religion not only of Khmers but of Champa, Sumatra and Java.

Further Mahayana Buddhism, when professed by Khmer emperors, retained all the court ceremonials, temple festivals and rituals of Shaivism. A tenth century inscription of Srey Santhor throws much light on this question. "The royal chaplain is by no means to abandon the worship of Shiva, but he is to be well-versed in Buddhist learning, and on feast days he will bathe the statue of the Buddha with due ceremony." Thus when a Khmer king became Buddhist, there was little change in the court ceremonial or worship but the Royal God, instead of being represented as Shiva, assumed the character of a Bodhisatva. It was as if he were a Vaishnava instead of a Shaiva. All the paraphernalia of temple worship continued as usual, and as far as the people were considered, there was little difference in their burden whether the emperor was a Shaiva, Vaishnava or Mahayana Buddhist. Hence when the Siamese introduced Hinayana Buddhism into Cambodia which was breaking under the top-heavy temple ritual, the people were only too willing to accept it. The court pathetically clung to its ancient Brahmanic ceremonial, even when the kings turned Hinayanists, and in Cambodia and Siam, Brahmins



were retained for fixing lucky days, consulting omens and superintending ancient rites which had lost all meaning with the arrival of Hinayana Buddhism.

The Khmers cultivated the study of Sanskrit. Though they produced no great work of originality, Indian scriptures and secular literature were well-known to the scholars of Cambodia. Of the presentation of copies of *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* by Somavarman to certain temple authorities, we have already related. Of king Surya Varman I it is said that he was well versed in the *Atharva Veda*, "also, in the Bhashya, Kavyas, the six Darsanas, and the Dharmasastras." Tantric literature was also current among the Brhamins as some of the rituals were definitely Tantric. Though the Khmers thus valued the treasures of Sanskrit literature and assiduously cultivated its study, scholasticism in Cambodia never assumed the proportions of the wordy duels of India in Huien Tsang's and Sankara's times.

Now the question may well be asked what connection the Khmers, the most important of the races that built up empires modelled on Indian conceptions of statecraft and religion, maintained with the mother country. The arts, religion, the court ceremonial and the laws of the Khmer empire were thoroughly Brhaminical in inspiration, and the ceremonials, especially, needed the services of thousands of Brahmins proficient in Vedic lore. It is highly probable that a good many Brahmins went to the Khmer courts from India. The building programmes of the Khmers and the sculptor's art were essentially based on patterns standardised in India and the architects of the Angkor shrines certainly must have had Indian consultants on the spot to advise the Khmer artisans. Further, pilgrimages to the sacred sites in India is constantly stressed in the epics and the Puranas and it is unlikely that the Khmers who were ardent students of these texts neglected this act of piety. Above all, the Khmers had a good navy and

mercantile marine and seaborne commerce with India was regular and brisk, and Indian ports were familiar to Khmer traders and seamen.

Yet, except some stray reference in inscriptions we have no record of Indo-Khmer commerce. The reason for this is not far to seek; Indians were notoriously indifferent to the people who visited their country, and the Khmers, following Indians, were not less indifferent. The idea will become clear when we contemplate how much of the regular Sino-Indian cultural commerce that started in the first century of the Christian era and lasted till the eighth century, would have been known to us if we had no Chinese annals and the records of pilgrims like Fa Hien, Tsang and I-Ching. If we were to rely entirely on Indian records, China would have appeared to us as good as non-existent.

#### CHAMPA

Another important kingdom of Indo China that drew its inspiration from Brahmanic ideals and rose to considerable importance in middle ages was Champa. In the heyday of its glory Champa was almost as powerful as the Khmer kingdom but the Annamite expansion gave it a crushing blow in the fifteenth century after which it continued a precarious existence with steadily diminishing borders till it vanished from the map of Indo China in the eighteenth century, having been completely absorbed by Annam.

The exact boundaries of Champa are not known, but during the height of its power, the main kingdom lay to the east and south of the Khmer kingdom extending to the China Sea. At what precise date the Chams established themselves in the peninsula is not known. The Cham language indicates a Malay-Polynesian origin, and they were in all probability invaders from the sea. The Chinese annals would indicate that they had settled down in Indo China and carved out a kingdom for themselves, known

as Lin-yi, before the third century A. D; the Chin annals state that the king of Lin-yi, Fan Hsiung, who came to the throne in 270 A.D, in alliance with the king of Funan, were raiding the Chinese province of Chiao-chi (Tonking). The chronicles further state that Lin-yi was founded in 192 A. D. and had expanded northwards by annexing territories under Chinese control during the decadence of the Han dynasty.

It is not known whether the Chams brought with them an Indian civilisation from the Malay Peninsula or the islands farther south, or they became Indianised after their arrival in Indo China by contact with the then flourishing kingdom of Funan. The Cham legends too do not enlighten us much on this point; for they traced their origin to two clans of the cabbage palm and the cocoanut. But their culture in its rise was essentially Brahmanic like that of the Khmers.

The name Champa is traced to the capital of Anga in the lower Gangetic valley, the legendary city of Karna of the *Mahabharata*. What connection the Chams had with this distant region is not known. Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri is, however, of opinion that Champa was also a name of Kaveripatanam, the capital of the Cholas, and the name of the kingdom of the Chams owes its origin to the Cholas. But what is not quite clear is, if the Champa of Anga and the Champa of the Cholas could have had independent origins, why the Chams who were well acquainted with Sanskrit names in South East Asia could not have called their country Champa independent of Anga and Chola.

Be that as it may, the earliest Cham inscription pertains to a king named Bhadravarman, (c. fourth century A. D.) who is said to have built a sanctuary at Mi-son, dedicated to Shiva-Bhadresvara. Thus the cult of the Royal God, as the identification of Bhadravarman with Isvara (Shiva) would indicate, was prevalent in Champa as in Cambodia.

The inscription which is purely Brahmanic and is in connection with a sacrifice reads as under: "Homage to the Deity! By the favour of the feet of Lord Bhadresvara, I shall make thee pleasant to Agni. As long as the sun and the moon endure, he will release the sons and grandsons of the great Dharmic king, Sri Bhadravarman. By the favour of Mother Earth, may this sacrifice be successful." A postscript to the inscription "implies human sacrifice, and there is perhaps nothing to prevent our accepting this as a fact, seeing that offering human sacrifices to propitiate Shiva is mentioned in the *Atharva Veda* and the *Mahabharata*."

Bhadravarman built an important temple at Mi-son dedicated to the cult of the Linga and the Royal God. The main structure was of wood and it was burnt in 575 A. D, but its ruins, still extant, would indicate that it was a magnificent shrine. Bhadravarman's son abdicated and went on a pilgrimage to the Ganges and died in India.

The political history of Champa from the time of Bhadravarman till the disappearance of the kingdom is one of continued struggle with Annam in the north and Cambodia in the west. In the beginning, the Chams, not well acquainted with the power of China seem to have had dreams of the conquest of China. In the middle of the fifth century they attacked China with disastrous effects to themselves. Champa was conquered and occupied by the Chinese and the booty obtained from the temples was quite considerable. "The idols alone when melted yielded a hundred thousand pounds of weight of pure gold." In Champa, as in India and Cambodia, temples seem to have been centres of hoards of gold. The Chinese, however, evacuated Champa, but from then onwards, Chinese claimed suzerainty over Champa; the attitude of Champa

towards this claim had been to behave as though she were independent when she felt powerful enough to look after herself but to send tributes to China to claim help when the Annamites or Cambojans became too powerful for resistance.

Champa was divided into three provinces, and the capital constantly changed between the main cities as war strategy needed. The main Champa provinces were 1) Amaravati in the north (the modern Quang-nam) with its main cities Indrapura and Simhapura; 2) Vijaya (modern Bing-Dinh) with the town of Vijaya and Sri Vinaya, and, 3) Panduranga or Panran in the south (modern Phanrang and Binh-Thuan) with Virapura or Rajapura as the main cities. Because of the constant wars and the changing of capitals, the Chams could not find much time for engaging themselves in building and cultural activities and in this respect their achievements were definitely inferior to those of the Khmers. At the present Mi-son, the site of ancient Simhapura, many ruins bespeaking of ancient glory of Champa have been discovered along with inscriptions. While most of the shrines were dedicated to Shaiva cult, Vaishnavism also enjoyed favour. The inscriptions of a king named Vikrantavarman (650-79) record the construction and dedication of a temple to the sage Valmiki; "the sage," says the record, "was an incarnation of Vishnu, and in his grief, he uttered a verse that was highly respected of Brahma." The *Ramayana*, it would appear, was held in greater esteem in Champa than even in India; for in India, no temple has been dedicated to Valmiki, and though held in high esteem, he is not worshipped as a deity.

Another interesting feature of Champan history is its close cultural ties with the Pallavas of South India. Her kings like the Pallavas and the Khmers, assumed, on coronation, a regnal title ending in Varman. Some of the Cham inscriptions are in the script used by Pallavas, and her

art and architecture bear close affinity to those of the Pallavas and of Amaravati. It is more than probable that the Chams employed South Indian craftsmen and architects in their building activities.

The Chams, though they had to contend with the land forces of Cambodia and Annam, were essentially a sea power, and appear to have come into conflict with the maritime empires of Java and Sumatra. In the eighth century two successful attacks by Java on Champa has been mentioned; in the ninth century the Chams went on the offensive and led successful expeditions against the island empires.

Till the ninth century, the dominant religion of Champa was Brahminism, though Mahayana Buddhism had been preached and tolerated. The Brahmins were great ritualists, though there was no established hierarchy as that headed by the Sivakaivalyas of Cambodia. But in the matter of Vedic ritual and orthodoxy, the Champan Brahmins were even more orthodox than the Cambodian; for a seventh century inscription "quotes with approval the saying that the horse sacrifice is the best of good deeds, and the murder of the Brahmin the worst of sins." The high priest or royal chaplain is styled Sri Paramapurohita. Sati seems to have been prevalent in medieval Champa.

Though the Chams were great admirers of Sanskrit and gave high-sounding Sanskrit names to their cities, towns, priests and kings, the study of Sanskrit was not so well cultivated in Champa as in Cambodia. The language of the Sanskrit inscriptions is often faulty and careless, and the construction of sentences grammatically weak.

Mahayana Buddhism became dominant in Champa in the ninth century and under king Indravarman III (854-93) enjoyed royal patronage. He is said to have built a great Buddhist monastery at Simhapura. But as in Cambodia,

Buddhism tended to become a sect of Hinduism in Champa too and the shrines contained images of deities of both Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. There was no rivalry between the two religions, and Buddhism, like Hinduism, became part of the court ceremonial of the Royal God.

Marco Polo visited Champa in the thirteenth century and found it in a flourishing state. A Chinese traveller by name Ma Tuan-lin also visited the kingdom in the same century and has left us an account of the Chams. According to him, the people were of the same stock as of ancient Funan, matriarchal institutions were prevalent, women choosing their husbands and proposing to them. All marriages, it would appear, took place in the eighth month "He also mentions the custom of urn burial. Seven days after death, the king's body is ceremoniously conducted to the sea-shore, where it is burnt on a pyre. The bones are then placed in a gold vase and thrown into the sea."

The thirteenth century was also marked by the invasion of Champa by Kublai Khan. The Mongols, did succeed in occupying Champa, but the rebellious Chams proved more of a liability to the empire than an asset, and the Khan was only too glad to evacuate Champa on the Cham prince accepting nominal vassalage of the Mongols.

Champa reached the zenith of her glory under a king named Bong Nga who waged successful war with the Annamites and sacked Hanoi. His navy cleared the coastal regions of pirates and kept the Annamites in constant fear of raids. In 1390 the Cham king, was however killed in a sea fight, and after this the decline of the Chams set in. The traditional enmity between Annam and Champa led to a final battle in 1471 which proved the ruin of Champa. Some sixty thousand Chams were killed in action, and the royal family and 30,000 prisoners were carried off into captivity.

Champa never recovered from this blow. A succession of kings, recognized by China, continued to exist in

the south till the last king fled before an Annamite attack in 1720; the last of his descendants died early in the twentieth century.

Though the royal family thus perished, the Chams are not completely extinct as a race. They number at present about 130,000 and inhabit the southern regions of Viet Nam and Cambodia. A good many of the Chams embraced Islam while others still follow Hinduism of a sort; but both Hinduism and Islam among Chams are unlike these religions followed anywhere else, their mutual influences having made them almost indistinguishable from one another. As an example may be pointed out the Muslim practice of calling their priests Acar (Sanskrit, Acharya), and their heads Grus (Guru), while the Brahmin priests are called Baseh which is not derived from any Sanskrit term.





## CHAPTER XVII

### INDONESIA

THE Indian cultural expansion into Java and Sumatra is in all probability anterior to that into Indo-China, but our knowledge of early Indian contacts with the islands is disappointingly meagre. The Chinese, because of the close proximity of Indo China to the borders of their empire, kept themselves well-informed about the strength and weakness of their neighbours and have recorded much in their annals concerning the history, geography and the people of this region. But Java and Sumatra are far removed from China, the knowledge of their travellers and geographers about these islands and their kingdoms was poor, and their political interests were confined to an occasional naval expedition when an ambitious emperor wished to have his power and prestige felt in distant lands.

Indian literature, as usual, is even more disappointing. The *Ramayana*, no doubt, mentions Java as Yavadwipa, but more than this we know little about the island from this epic. Early Mediterranean geographers state that ships used to sail from the Coromandel Coast to the island of 'Chryse', believed to be Sumatra, then reputed to produce gold in abundance. The Alexandrian geographer Claudius Ptolemy, who wrote in the second century of the Christian era, mentions several islands of the Indian Sea beyond India, among which was Iabadiou, 'the Yavadwipa' of Indians. Most of these islands were inhabited by cannibals, and the denizens of the island of 'Satyroi' had, according to Ptolemy, long tails. Very little historical data can be adduced from the writings of these ancients except a general idea that South East Asia, in the early centuries of the Christian era, were peopled by backward races,

There is one more difficulty in tracing the origin of Indian influence and its extent in the islands when compared with Indo China. For while most of the peoples from Burma to Indo China have retained their Indian religion and social institutions which form a living force at present, Java, Sumatra and other Indianised islands near about, with the exception of Bali, have accepted Islam, along with the Malay Peninsula, and this has considerably altered, if not obliterated, the force of Indian cultural influences. The great monuments of Java, now in ruins, and the numerous inscriptions and art remains found in Sumatra, Borneo and Celebes, however, tell an eloquent tale of the close contact these regions maintained with India, of great empires and seafaring kingdoms built upon Indian models. It is interesting to note that many tribes of Sumatra have now clan names such as Chola, Pandya, Pallava, Malayala, all pointing to a South Indian origin.

The earliest inscriptions in the islands are found at Kutei in Borneo and near Djakarta in Java. These are believed to belong to the beginning of the fourth century A. D. The Kutei inscription, engraved on sacrificial posts, is the eulogy of a king named Mulavarman whose father's name was Asvavarman and grandfather's Kundunga; the latter does not seem to have been the same as Kaundinya especially as the inscription clearly states that Asvavarman was the founder of the dynasty. The Java inscription, appearing under a pair of feet reads: "These footprints which are like those of Vishnu belong to the illustrious Purnavarman, the lord of Taruma Nagara, a valiant ruler of the earth." Purnavarman, obviously was a Vaishnava and the prevailing religion at the time was Hinduism; we have also Fa Hien's testimony to the effect that the island kingdoms were inhabited by "Brahmins and heretics" and the law of the Buddha was little known. Soon after Fa Hien's visit, a Kashmiri monk named Gunavarman visited the islands and preached Mahayana Buddhism there.

The Chinese annals record a mission from the island of 'Kan-t'o-li' sent by a king named Sri Varanarendra who ruled between 454 and 464 A. D. The mission was headed by a worthy named Rudra who was a Brahmin. Sri Varanarendra's successor seems to have accepted Buddhism, and his son Vijayavarman is said to have sent another mission to China.

#### SRI VIJAYA EMPIRE

Except these scrappy references and occasional inscriptions, little authentic is known about the early history of Java and Sumatra. In 671 the Chinese pilgrim I-Ching visited Sumatra and his accounts give us some idea of the religion and political activities of the island. Sumatra was now the dominant power in these regions and the Sumatran empire, known as Sri Vijaya, claimed suzerainty over most of the islands of the archipalego and the southern regions of the Malay Peninsula. The Sri Vijaya emperors were Buddhists. Unlike Huiien Tsang who seldom lost an opportunity of befriending great men and noting down the manner of life of the court and the people, I-Ching was interested only in the progress of Buddhism in the countries he visited; he tells us that Buddhism was in a flourishing state in Sri Vijaya, there were over a thousand monks in the capital and their mode of life was the same as that of Indian monks. There was much learning in the country; the pilgrim spent six months in Sri Vijaya studying Sanskrit grammar. He then proceeded to Nalanda but in 685 returned to Sri Vijaya. He seems to have loved this country; for in 689 he went to Canton and again came back to Sri Vijaya with four collaborators and plenty of writing material; in 692 he completed his accounts of the progress of Buddhism in the countries he visited and sent the manuscripts to China. Even after his work was over, he was reluctant to leave Sri Vijaya, but in 695 he returned to China and never came back.

I-Ching's accounts would indicate that during his stay, Sri Vijaya was an expanding power and had conquered part of the Malay Peninsula and was conducting successful expeditions against Java. The capital of Sri Vijaya was Palembang, conveniently placed between the straits of Malacca and of Sunda, and the emperors forced every ship that passed that way to call at Sri Vijaya ports and pay them duty. The proceedings collected by this imperial compulsion must have been very considerable and the main source of revenue of the empire. For maritime traffic between China and India was very brisk at the period; I-Ching says he travelled from China to Sri Vijaya in a ship bound for Persia and his journey to India from Sri Vijaya was made in a ship belonging to Sri Vijaya.

The Sri Vijaya emperors seem to have been great patrons of Mahayana Buddhism and had evinced keen interest in the Buddhist centres of Nalanda and South India. They had built Buddhist temples in Nagapatanam, as we have seen, with the permission of South Indian kings, and the rise of Sailendras in Java, another dynasty of Buddhists, coincides with the interest taken by the Sri Vijayas and was probably inspired by their example. These Sailendras, according to certain scholars, were immigrants from India, while others think they were Indianised Javanese. An edict of a Pala king of Bengal of the 9th century records "the dedication of five villages to a Vihara founded at Nalanda by Balaputradeva, who is styled king of Sumatra and a descendant of the Sailendras of Java." The Sailendras seem to have come into possession of the Sri Vijaya empire by marriage into the Sumatran line of Sri Vijaya.

Contemporary with the Buddhist Sri Vijaya emperors, there were, it would appear, tributary or independent Shaiva dynasties in Java. The kingdom of Mataram in East Java, was one of these. A scion of this line built the

splendid monuments of the Parbanam group, some 156 buildings constructed round eight major shrines in the centre of which is a Shaiva temple. On this temple is carved in relief the story of *Ramayana* as on Borobodour stupa is sculptured the life of the Buddha.

Anyway, there was little difference between Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism in the island kingdoms. The cult of the Royal God was the main religion in Indonesia as in Indo China, and when a king preferred Buddhism, he was represented as a Bodhisatva instead of as Shiva or Vishnu. The cult of Shiva-Buddha was as popular as that of any other deity. The *Nagarakertagama*, a Javanese work of the fourteenth century, makes the point quite clear; the royal hero is a devout Buddhist but worships Shiva-Buddha, and in the temple dedicated to the Royal God, the lower storey is used for worship of Shiva and the upper for that of the Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya. The same impartiality is also in evidence in art and architecture; for in most of the Javanese temples now lying in ruins, we find a promiscuous pantheon of Prajnana-parimita, Manjusri, Ganesha, the Lingam, Tara, Shiva, Durga and Brahma.

By the end of the eighth century, the Sri Vijaya empire of Sumatra and the Sailendras of Java seem to have fused, and the activities of the empire extended not only to the Malay Peninsula but to all the coastal regions from Burma to Annam. The facts of the period are confusing, chronology is uncertain, and names of kings, chieftains and priests flit across the general gloom. We do not even know who built the wonderful shrine of Borobodour. Considered by connoisseurs as one of the greatest achievements of the world, this mighty stupa was built by a Sailendra emperor in the ninth century. 150 feet high, it is built to ascend a natural hill on the top of which stands the central shrine. "To traverse the whole distance through the galleries upto the summit involves a walk of over three miles. The walls of the galleries on both sides

are adorned with bas reliefs of sculptures illustrating Mahayana texts. They run to thousands. In addition there are 400 statues of the Buddha... From the point of view of the Buddhist, the sanctuary as a whole forms an impressive and convincing textbook of Buddhism as taught by the Nalanda school. The style of sculpture follows the classic models of Gupta India, but the reliefs are not Indian, they are Javanese. They provide a wonderful picture of Javanese life and customs. The Javanese artists in adopting Indian models had already changed them in conformity with their own traditions."

The beginning of art in the islands is, however, traced to Amaravati, especially in the matter of Buddha statues, which had to conform to certain conventions. "A bronze from south Djember, 42 centimetres high, and therefore larger than the usual run of Javanese statuettes; another, still larger, (75 centimetres) found in Sikendeng on the West Coast of Celebes, and the colossal stone Buddha of Bukit Seguntung at Palembang recently restored to almost its original form by a head from Batavia Museum successfully tried on its trunk — all are in characteristic Amaravati style, even the differences noticeable among them exactly reproducing similar differences in the Amaravati images. It is probable that the bronzes were brought from Amaravati by the colonists or imported by colonists, already established, from there. The transport of the large stone Buddha at Palembang must have been more difficult, if not impossible, and if it was locally made it must have been by an artist who went to school at Amaravati. The art of Amaravati reached its high watermark in the latter half of the second century or early third century A. D. and the Buddha of Palembang shows affinities with the earliest phase of this development."

The causes of the decline and fall of the Sri Vijaya empire is not known. We have noticed their prolonged naval war with the Cholas which weakened them considerably. It must however be stressed that Sri Vijaya was

not a unified, consolidated unit administered by a powerful central authority but, like most empires of the east, a conglomeration of states ruled by Rajahs and chieftains who owed nominal allegiance and paid tribute to the emperor as long as he was strong enough to levy them. But at the slightest sign of weakness they showed a rebellious spirit and tried to assert their independence. This was probably what happened in Sri Vijaya. The long wars with the Cholas exhausted the empire, and its end was hastened by the invasions of Kublai Khan in the thirteenth century, and the expansion of Siam which came in active conflict with Sri Vijaya possessions in the Malay Peninsula. Islam too had now entered the fray. For when Marco Polo visited these regions, he found Sumatra divided into a number of petty states and Perlac, at the northern end, following the Law of the Prophet. Samudra, another state, had also become Muslim; for a tombstone of Malik-al Saleh, shows that he was the Sultan of Samudra and had died in 1297 A. D. The Muslim influence was gradually spreading in the coastal regions of the islands and of the Malay Peninsula and the Hindu kingdoms could feel safe only in the interior.

#### JAVANESE KINGDOMS

During the decline of the Sri Vijaya empire, East Java came into much prominence under a ruler named Airlangga. He considerably enhanced his prestige by marrying a Sumatran princess of the Sri Vijaya line and appears in Javanese legend as a great patron of letters and promoter of trade and agriculture. The Javanese masterpiece *Arjunavivaha* was composed in his reign by the court poet Mpu Kanwa; it was probably a wedding gift of the poet to his patron whose marriage to the Sumatran princess was actually eulogized under the cloak of the celebrated marriage of Arjuna, one of the heroes of the *Mahabharata*. The work pertains to the 11th century.

Airlangga's main ports in the Bay of Surabaya, we are told, traded with China and were transit emporia of

trade between India and China. "The Tamils, the Sinhalese, Malabaris, Chams, Mons, and Khmers" had their settlements in his ports. Airlangga's religious convictions and the prevailing notions show an interesting synthesis of Hinduism and Buddhism. His inscriptions mention three religious sects: Brahmins, Mahayana Buddhists and Rishis or Ascetics. "The Mahayana, especially in its Tantric form, was becoming a secret sect, to which the highest in the land belonged. Shaivism was the first stage on the way to enlightenment; after passing through it, the believer was ready to be initiated into the higher Buddhistic knowledge." Airlangga himself was, however, a Vaishnava, and his mausoleum at Belahan "contained a remarkable portrait statue of him as Vishnu riding on Garuda. It was the common practice of kings of his line to be worshipped after death in the form of Vishnu. Ancestor worship was a special task laid upon the king. At certain set times, he had to establish ritual contact with his ancestors in order to strengthen his position by the receipt of new magical powers from them. Hence the many Chandis scattered about East Java, celebrating a dead ruler in the guise of Shiva, Vishnu or the Bodhisatva Avalokitesvara were all centres of ancestor worship and although outwardly Hindu or Buddhist, represented a cult that was a survival from the pre-Hindu past."

Airlangga, in his old age, divided his kingdom between his two sons and became a Rishi. The two kingdoms were again united by the marriage of Kamesvara, king of Kediri, with the princess Kirana of Jangalla in the year c. 1120 A. D. Kediri now emerges as an important state mentioned by travellers and in Chinese annals. The Kediri kings, like Airlangga, were patrons of literature, and Dharmaja's poem *Smaradahana* celebrates Kamesvara's marriage in which he is prepresented as the Hindu love god Kama, and his wife, as Rati. In the reign of Jayabhaya (1135-57), another Kediri king, was produced



the *Bharatayuddha*, the celebrated Javanese version of the *Mahabharata*.

Kediri fell in the year 1222, and on its ruins rose the kingdom of Singosari. Under this dynasty Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism became almost indistinguishable in Java. The ashes of king Vishnuvardhana of Singosari (1248-68), for instance, were divided into two and given to a Shaiva and a Buddhist shrine. In the former, Chandi Mleri, he was worshipped as Shiva and at the latter, Chandi Djago, as the Bodhisatva Amoghapasa. The last king of Singosari, Kertanagara, was probably the greatest. The Javanese poem *Nagarakertagama*, composed in 1365 by Prapanca, a Buddhist abbot, is a eulogy of this king. Another poem, *Pararatan*, probably composed by an author who was an enemy of his, describes the king as a drunkard who ruined himself and his kingdom by his indulgence in vice. Anyway, Kertanagara considerably enlarged his kingdom, and by uniting under him the princes of Indonesia wanted to ward off the threat of Mongol invasion of the islands. With this end in view, he strengthened his power by marriage alliances with Sumatran kingdoms and by warring on hostile neighbours. But as the Mongol Armada under Admiral Yi-k'o-mu-su was nearing its destination in 1293, Kertanagara, who was conducting a Tantric rite with his select friends in his palace was surprised by Jayakatung, prince of Kediri, who led a rebellion against him. Kertanagara was drinking palm wine, according to *Pararatan*, when the attack took place; he was captured and put to death.

It would appear Kertanagara's religion was Kalachakra Buddhism, a form of Tantric cult which was widely prevalent in Bengal at the time and exported to several countries including Java. Midnight orgies seem to have been an important part of the mysterious rites of Kalachakra.

Jayakatung of Kediri however did not benefit much by his victory. Kertanagara's son-in-law, prince Vijaya, who went into hiding at the time of Kertanagara's capture, returned to Java and in alliance with the Mongols defeated Jayakatung. Then he attacked his erstwhile allies when they least expected it and Admiral Yi-ko-mu-su was happy to escape with his life. The Mongols, pre-occupied with too many irons in the fire, did not come on any punitive expeditions, and Vijaya built his Kraton at Majapahit, in the lower Brantas valley, and founded the last of the great Javanese dynasties that followed the Indian traditions. He ascended the throne in 1293 and assumed the regnal title of Kertarajasa Jayavardhamana.

#### THE KINGDOM OF MAJAPAHIT

The power and prestige of Majapahit was much exaggerated by the Javanese writers especially Prapanca who invest the empire with overlordship of practically all the islands and the Malay Peninsula. But available independent evidence would indicate that Majapahit was confined to East Java, Madura and Bali. In Sumatra Islam was making steady headway; Ibn Batutua who visited the island in 1345 states that Samudra (a kingdom of Sumatra) had been Muslim for over a century. Anyway, if we are to believe Javanese literature, Majapahit was a great power which had maintained diplomatic relations with Burma, Siam, Cambodia, Champa, Viet Nam, China, Bengal and the South Indian kingdoms.

The *Nagarakertagama* gives us detailed information about the administration of the state. The principal functions of the state were under the control of the king and his relatives. "There was a survey of all private and sacred lands; police duties were laid down and families numbered; fixed occupations were assigned to various classes of population; regulations were issued concerning gifts to officials, and pious foundations, the maintenance of the army, the protection of cultivating and landholding,

the payment of the royal revenues, the assessment of taxation and the enforcement of the various forms of labour services."

Much of the organisation of the kingdom and its civil administration were instituted by a famous minister of Majapahit, named Gaja Mada, who was the virtual ruler of the kingdom from 1330 till 1364. He re-wrote the *Kutaramanava* (which had been based on the code of Manu) the principal law book in Java and Sumatra before the Majapahit period. An interesting copper plate inscription tells us how cases were judged in Java. The judge had to take into account the written laws, local customs and traditions, and the opinion of elders and teachers. Gaja Mada is said to have been such an energetic and versatile genius that on his death his work had to be distributed to four ministers.

After Gaja Mada's death decline set in. We hear no more of great kings and ministers. Chinese interference increased, and the kings of Majapahit were not even able to keep off pirates from its ports. The coastal kingdoms were steadily becoming Muslim and in 1478, according to Javanese tradition, a coalition of Muslim states dealt Majapahit a crushing blow. After this a weak Majapahit kingdom lingered for some time and early in the sixteenth century the Portuguese reported the existence of a 'heathen kingdom' in Java. Its end is shrouded in mystery, and it was possibly absorbed by the advancing Muslim kingdoms against whom it was unable to put up an effective struggle.

Anyway, it must be mentioned, that Islam did not come to Indonesia as a religion of an invading race who forced it on the population. It was brought to the islands and the Malay Peninsula by missionaries and traders, not only from Arabia and Persia, but also from Gujerat and South India, and the people seem to have willingly accepted it. The Indonesian population was probably overburdened

with the top-heavy Indian religions and ceremonies, and welcomed the simplicity and democratic spirit of Islam as a desirable change. What Hinayana Buddhism did to Cambodia, Islam seems to have done to Indonesia.

#### JAVANESE LITERATURE

It is interesting to note that Indian culture remained in Indonesia something of a superstructure on Indonesian, moulded and modified to Indonesian needs. The Wayang or shadow play of Java is indigenous in origin, though the themes are Indian. The Indo-Indonesian cultural blending is nowhere better marked than in literature. For though the study of Sanskrit was cultivated in court and religious circles, the Javanese language, known as Kavi, remained the most important language of the country, and produced a great body of literature. Scholars mention three phases in the development of the Javanese language. Old Javanese (before the Majapahit period), Middle Javanese (during this period), and New Javanese after the fall of Majapahit.

While the language itself had remained basically Javanese, Sanskrit enriched it and the themes were mainly Indian though the authors took considerable freedom with the originals in order to give their works local popularity. One of the earliest works preserved, known as *Tantoe, Panggelaran* is a treatise on cosmology written in the ninth century in Old Javanese in which Indian ideas were mixed with indigenous myths. The *Arjunavivaha* and the *Bharatayuddha* have already been mentioned. A Javanese version of the *Ramayana*, known as *Kavi Ramayana* appeared in the twelfth century, "It follows in essentials the story of *Ramayana* but was apparently composed by a poet unacquainted with Sanskrit who drew his knowledge from some native source now unknown..... All this literature is based upon classical Sanskrit models and is not distinctly Buddhist although the prose version of the *Mahabharata* states that it was written for Brahmins,

Saivites and Buddhists. Many other translations or adaptations of Sanskrit works are mentioned, such as *Nitisastra*, *Sarasamuccaya*, the *Tantri*, in several editions, a prose translation of *Brahmanda Purana*, together with grammars and dictionaries..... It seems clear that during the Majapahit epoch or perhaps even before it, a strong current of Buddhism permeated Javanese literature somewhat in contrast to the works hitherto referred to. Brandes states that *Sutasoma*, *Vighnotsava*, *Kunjarakarna*, *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan* and *Buddhampamutas* are purely Buddhist works." Most of these works are, however, but mere names to us, the originals having perished with Majapahit, only references being retained in extant works mostly preserved in Bali.

#### BALI

The island of Bali, lying in close proximity to Java, is important to the student of Indian culture in Indonesia. Its people resisted the advance of Islamic culture into these regions and has come down to us an island community of Hindus who have preserved the ancient traditions of Indonesia.

The Balinese themselves have a tradition that their kingdom was founded by immigrants from Majapahit who did not wish to accept Islam. This does not seem to be quite correct; for while the defeat of Majapahit by the Muslim states in 1478 must have caused a refugee movement to Bali, the original kingdom itself seems to have been very ancient, though its history has not been preserved in Bali. Chinese sources mention a country named P'oli from which ambassadors came to the court between 513 and 630 A. D. The identity of this country is not established beyond doubt, but some historians think it to be Bali which was at that time, the centre of an important kingdom. The Chinese have recorded that the royal family of P'oli belonged to the line of Kaundinya. "The people of this country use cotton for their clothes,

and also make *sarangs* of it. The king uses a texture of flowered silk wrapped round his body; on his head he wears a golden hat, more than one foot high, its shape resembling the one called *pein* in China, adorned with various precious stones. He carries a sword inlaid with gold, sits on a golden throne with his feet on a silver stool. His female servants adorn themselves with golden flowers and all kinds of valuables, and some of them carry white feather dusters or fans of peacock feathers. When the king goes out, his carriage, which is made of different kinds of fragrant wood is drawn by an elephant. On top of it is a flat canopy of feathers, and it has embroidered curtains on both sides. People blowing conches and beating drums precede and follow him."

Whether the description is of the king of Bali or not, it is clear that Bali was a considerable power before the rise of Majapahit. An early Balinese charter is dated Saka 818 (A. D. 896), and late in the tenth century, the reigning Rajah of Bali married a Javanese princess.

Balinese religion of today is Hinduism of the Javanese type with an admixture of indigenous cults like the worship of Lord of the Soil. In Bali, however, the cult of Shiva-Aditya (a combined form of Shiva and Surya, the sun-god) became more important than that of Shiva-Buddha practised in Java. There are also some Buddhist shrines in Bali, though Buddhism did not have much appeal to the Balinese.

The Balinese have a version of the *Vedas* but these are in reality works containing Tantric spells mainly intended to control spirits and celestials, the "only part of the real Veda being a corruption of the Gayatri Mantra". The preservation of the Javanese Kavi works was the special care of the Balinese when the Majapahit kingdom fell and the refugees migrated to Bali.

Balinese society is still based on the Indian Varna-srama Dharma or caste, and the orthodox Balinese castes

are Brahmins, Satriyas (Kshatriyas) Visias (Vaisyas), and Sudras with a fifth caste, Parias (the Panchamas of the Hindus). These distinctions are "rigidly observed and though intermarriages (which in former times was often punished with death) is now permitted, the offspring are not recognized as belonging to the superior parent. The bodies of the dead are not buried but burnt, and Sati, which was formerly frequent, is believed to take place in noble families. Pork is the only meat used, and as in other Hindu countries, oxen are never slaughtered."

The Indonesian element is also mixed up with the Indian, in Balinese religion. The dieties are believed to be flying about like birds (a Polynesian belief) and the main object of ritual worship is to immobilise them and make them perch on the images. These hovering deities are called Devas as in India, but many of the Devas such as Gunung Agung are nature spirits identified, by Brahmin synthesis, with Indian gods. Ganesha, Indra, Vishnu, Krishna, Surya, Garuda, Shiva (especially in the form of the Linga) and Durga, and the heroes of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are all familiar figures in Balinese mythology and iconography, and there are numerous festivals held in their honour. Durga temples contain images of her attendant Kaliki in addition to those of Durga herself. Curiously enough, some of these temples have images described as Pusa, the Chinese term for Bodhisatva, which would indicate Chinese influences in Bali. Even in the famous Balinese dances, based on temple ritual as it is, some scholars have discovered Chinese influences.

Though Brahmins are held in high esteem, the Peganku or priests of indigenous gods rank higher than the Pedanda as the Brahmins are termed by the Balinese. All this would show that in Bali, as in Java, Indian culture formed a superstructure on an Indonesian base.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### BURMA

THE name by which Burma was known to Sanskrit writers was Suvarnabhumi or the Land of Gold. Whether Burma had gold mines in those days it is not clear, but it was its Sanskrit name that was accepted by the Mediterranean geographers who called it Golden Chryse as distinct from the island of that name by which was meant Sumatra. The Pali 'Sonaparanta' is merely a translation of Suvarnabhumi. It must, however, be borne in mind that the boundaries of Burma in those days were not the same as they are at present; the ancient Suvarnabhumi was probably the region now known as Pegu. Upper Burma, then inhabited by backward peoples, was little known to the ancients.

The regular history of Burma may be said to start from the eleventh century when her first great king Anawrata of Pagan, by a series of wars, conquered his neighbours and became the virtual master of all Burma. Before this period we have a wealth of legends about Burma but little history. But these legends are important to us since they show an Indian origin of Burmese civilisation and a traditional tendency to look upon India as the fountainhead of the cultural stream that flowed into and nourished Burma.

Burma is entirely Buddhist now; the origin of Buddhism in Burma is attributed by the Burmese to the Buddha himself who is said to have visited their country. Further, Tapussa and Ballika, the first two lay disciples of the Buddha were, according to Burmese legends, merchants of their country who were on a business tour of India. All this may be said to be inspired by the anxiety of Burmese monks to establish hoary antiquity for their religion. But another Burmese claim that Sona and Uttara, two missionaries of Asoka, preached Buddhism in Burma



is attested by the *Dipavamsa*, a fourth century Sinhalese work; but the difficulty in accepting this as authentic is the absence of mention of any missions to Burma in the inscriptions of Asoka. Further, Chinese chronicles would indicate that Burma before the first century of the Christian era was peopled by wild tribes who went naked and were cannibals; they were probably no better than the natives of Funan whom Kaundinya clothed, and were not the type of people who would have listened to Buddhist missionaries. Moreover, as we have already seen, Indian contact with the east had not started during Asoka's reign and the Mauryan cultural, political and diplomatic relations were mainly with the Greek empires to the west. As such, the Burmese and Sinhalese stories of the mission of Sona and Uttara, until we come by better evidence, must be relegated to that realm of legends inspired by a desire of later Buddhists to link the name of Asoka with Buddhism throughout the world.

#### EARLY INDIAN INFLUENCES

Racially the people of Burma may at present be divided into three, each with its own distinct language and ethnic peculiarities: The Mons of Lower Burma, the Shans of the north east and the regular Burmese who inhabit the other regions. Of these the Mons were more ancient than the other two who were later immigrants. The Mons are linguistically related to the Khmers, and both races probably have a common origin. They called their country Ramanadesa (modern Pegu) or the Land of the Rmon from which latter word was derived the shorter form 'Mon'. Indian influence came to the Mons first, in all probability in the first century of the Christian era; it would appear, the seafaring Telinganas of South India had built colonies in the Mon country and Indianised the Mons, on account of which, the Burmese, when they came in contact with the Mons, called them Tailangs. It is significant that the earliest Mon inscriptions are in the Pallava script.

The Burmese are believed to be of the same stock as the Tibetans, Nepalese and other peoples who now inhabit the Himalayan region; the original home of these people was to the south of the Gobi desert from where, due to pressure from China or nomad invasions, they moved down south into the Tibetan plateua, Burma and the Himalayan region. The exact date of their immigration into Burma is not known, but they became the most prominent people in Upper Burma by the ninth century of the Christian era. These Burmese did not occupy an empty land; they found Burma ruled by a civilised people known as Pyu with a language and Indianised culture. The capital of the Pyu was Sri Kshetra (Promé), and their inscriptions show that they followed Buddhism. Little else is known about the Pyu. Both the Pyu race and their language have disappeared; the Burmese absorbed them.

The Shans were a race related to the Siamese and were immigrants who came on the scene even later than the Burmese, and founded kingdoms in the regions bordering on Upper Siam.

The political history of Burma is largely a tale of the long struggle for supremacy by these three races and their kingdoms with varying success, till the British brought the country under a single rule which helped to develop Burman nationalism; the process of integration is still at work and cannot be said to be complete.

With the expansion of Indian culture to Indo-China, Malay Peninsula and the southern islands, Burma naturally came under the influence of India. Her religion from the time we know something about it, has been Hinayana Buddhism; though in later times, when Buddhism died out in India, the contact of Burma in religious matters was with Ceylon, earlier, South India, especially the city of Kanchi (Conjeevaram) which was an ancient stronghold of Hinayana, was the main religious centre with which Burma maintained cultural contacts. Anyway, from the

very beginning of their history Burma has been remarkably faithful to Hinayana Buddhism and the Pali Canon, and the country has a tradition which asserts that Buddha-ghosha, the compiler of the canon in its present form (see page 174) was a native of Thaton; this may be an exaggerated claim, but it is probable that he visited Thaton which was then rising as an important centre of Buddhist learning and left copies of the canon in the monasteries of the city.

While the main commerce between India and Burma has always been by the sea route, there was also infiltration of Brahminism and Mahayana Buddhism direct from East India by way of land. For while the mountains on the eastern borders of India have been a barrier effective enough to give Burma a separate geographical position, it has never been impassable and there was even an ancient trade route between India and China by way of Upper Burma; when the Chinese general Ch'ang K'ien visited Bactria in the second century B. C., we are told, he was considerably surprised to find the products of south China sold in the markets of Bactria; these commodities had come by the Burma route through India. Huien Tsang also mentions this overland trade route. It may be recalled that during the Japanese occupation of Burma in the second world war, the evacuation of Burma was carried out by the British mainly by the overland route.

A mysterious sect known as Ari, who were quite powerful in Upper Burma before Anawrata's reign in the eleventh century, in all probability drew their inspiration from an overland expansion of Indian culture from Bengal and Assam. The origin of the word "Ari" is variously traced to Aryan, Aran or Aranyaka (the latter two meaning forests, indicating their jungle ways). Whatever their origin, the Ari were thoroughly detested by orthodox Buddhists of the Hinayana persuasion, and were even persecuted. Their practices were said to be abominable. If we are to believe the stories of Hinayana monks, the

Aris "let their hair grow, worshipped serpents, hung up in their temples the heads of animals that had been sacrificed, claimed power to expiate all sins including parricide." They were Buddhists of a sort and lived in monasteries but were not celibate. They had considerable influence at the court before Anawrata's time and are said to have assisted the king to sacrifice a victim once a year to the Nats on a mountain top. King Anawrata suppressed the sect, but a curious inscription dated 1248 preserved in a village near Pagan asks the people to supply the Ari monks morning and evening "rice, beef, betel and a jar of wine." Another, dated 1468, would indicate their existence in the Myingyan district.

Brahmanic influences, anyway, were once predominant in Burma. Sri Kshetra kings, it would appear, had Vaishnava leanings, and the name Prome is derived from Pissanumyo or the town of Vishnu. Excavations at the site and at Pagan have unearthed many Vaishnava images and shrines, one of which at least is decorated with bas reliefs of the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

Though there are no traces in Burma of any powerful Brahmanic shrines and hierarchies as in Cambodia and Champa, Brahmins even after Buddhism became popular, were employed by the court and the people to cast horoscopes, fix lucky days and control evil spirits by their powerful magic. The earlier law books were all based on the *Code of Manu* which Buddhist writers later rewrote and brought into line with Buddhist teachings. All told, Brahminism played an important role in Indianising Burma, but later contact with Ceylon and a passion for adhering to Hinayana orthodoxy slowly obliterated Brahmanic influences. Further the study of Sanskrit was once cultivated in Burma, and certain inscriptions mention books with Sanskrit titles and of Pandits well versed in *Veda Sastras*. But later, a tendency in favour of Pali and indigenous languages developed, and the study of Sanskrit was neglected.

## DYNASTY OF ANAWRATA

The proper history of Burma starts, as already stated, with king Anawrata, the first Burmese king of Pagan. After warring on his neighbours and expanding his kingdom, he decided that his dynasty should not lag behind culturally; Thaton in the kingdom of Pegu was at that time considered the most important centre of Buddhism in these regions, claiming the privilege of having received the canon from Buddhaghosha himself and maintaining active contact with India and Ceylon. It irked Anawrata to see that Thaton was considered by the Buddhist world a greater cultural centre than Pagan, his own capital. So he wished to embellish his court with men of learning, reform the Buddhism then existent in Pagan and sent an embassy to Manohari, king of Pegu, for a copy of the correct version of the Pitakas, as then existed in Thaton, and the loan of a few learned monks. Manohari was beginning to get apprehensive of the growing power of Anawrata; hence he decided to show Anawrata his cultural superiority and sent back the mission with a brief message that Anawrata had not yet acquired the necessary qualification to read the correct version of the Pitakas. Anawrata proved his qualification by force of arms; he led an army against Manohari, captured all the monasteries in the country, collected the scriptures and all other available books and marched off Manohari and all the learned monks of Thaton to Pagan. The scriptures, we are told, were so many that several elephants were required to carry them. Thus all the culture of Thaton was transferred to Pagan overnight as it were. He housed the Pitakas in a magnificent pagoda and sent for copies from Ceylon in order to compare notes and settle the texts for the Burmese Canon.

Anawrata was a great builder too. Though his constant wars left him little time to prosecute extensive building programmes, he started building the famous

Shwezigon Pagoda of Pagan though he did not live long enough to complete it, which was done by his successor. Anawrata's son Kyazinthā, one of the greatest of Burmese monarchs, is of particular interest to the student of Indo-Burmese cultural relations, and deserves some detailed notice.

Anawrata, according to Burmese tradition, married an Indian princess of Vaisali whom for reasons that are not clearly explained he discarded; Kyazinthā was born of this princess. Till his father's death in 1077 he was, it would appear, living in hiding in the Mon country which had not taken kindly to Anawrata's conquest and was in a state of discontent if not of actual rebellion. The portrait statue of Kyazinthā sculptured in Ananda Temple in a kneeling position shows his features as typically Indian, and the legend of his mother having been Indian is not without foundation.

On Anawrata's death his son Sawlu succeeded him but his short reign was brought to a sudden end in the year 1084 by a Mon rebellion. Kyazinthā now ascended the throne and his coronation was a grand affair in Brahmanical style superintended by the Buddhist High Priest Shin Arahin, a captured Thaton monk who had been raised to this position by king Anawrata. Kyazinthā's long reign of 28 years was marked by peace and prosperity in the kingdom and extensive building activities. He had a partiality for the Mon language and culture, probably because Mon was his mother-tongue, and he had grown up among the Mons. Or it may be that Burmese had not yet developed into a literary language; for in Anawrata's time the Mon language was definitely superior to the Burmese, and though it is possible to transfer overnight learned men and Mon books from Pagan to Thaton, it was difficult to build up the literary traditions of the Burmese language in an equally short period. So the Burmese conquerors had to live for a long time under Mon cultural supremacy.

Kyazinthia completed the building of the Shwezigon Pagoda and embarked upon an extensive building programme. His greatest achievement was the construction of the Ananda temple at Pagan. This magnificent shrine "with its dazzling grab of white and its gilt spire glittering in the morning sun, is today one of the wonders of Pagan. On the outside of the temple are fifteen hundred plaques illustrating the Jataka tales each with an inscription in Pali or Mon, and inside the aisles eighty niches with sculptures of the early life of the Buddha. These are by Indian artists." The inspiration for the Ananda temple came from India. A legend says that eight monks, fleeing from persecution in India during Muslim onslaught, took refuge in Pagan, and they gave the king a description of the temple of Ananda in the Udayagiri hills of Orissa; according to another legend, however, the prototype of the Ananda temple was the grotto of the mythical Nandamula cave in the Himalayas. Anyway, it is clear that it was based on an Indian model, "and there can be no doubt that the architects who planned and built the Ananda temple were Indians. Everything in this temple from Sikhara to basement, as well as the numerous stone sculptures found in its corridors and the terracotta plaques that adorn the basement bear the indubitable stamp of Indian genius and craftsmanship except in one particular — It may here be remarked, *en paasant*, that from A. D. 1056, (after the conquest of Thaton) to about the 13th century, practically nothing is found in Pagan that does not bear the stamp of Indian workmanship; everything on them but the inscription is Indian. In this sense, we may take it therefore that the Ananda temple, though built in the Burmese capital, is an Indian temple." \*

Another important achievement of Kyazinthia was the restoration of the Buddhist temple at Bodhgaya which had fallen into neglect with the Muslim invasion and the decay

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\* Charles Busoiselle.

of Buddhism in India. Two Burmese inscriptions at Bodh-gaya describe how the king of Burma first sent a Guru who could not undertake the work, on which a prince and a minister were despatched who completed the work in 1086. The story of this restoration is also told in a Mon inscription at the Shweshandaw Pagoda at Prome. Kyazintha seems to have maintained diplomatic relations with China and the kingdoms of India. The visit of a Chola prince to his capital is recorded but the object of the mission of the prince is not known.

The good work of Kyanzitha and the cordial relations he maintained with India continued under his successors, and a large number of Indian monks fleeing before the Muslim invasion took refuge in Burma from East India and took with them Pala art and Tantric Buddhism. The link with northern India was, however, weakening before the advancing Muslims, and Burma was forging new ties with Ceylon. This connection led to some curious results. Panthagu, the primate of Burma, for instance, quarrelled with Narathu, the king of Pagan, and retired to Ceylon in 1167 but returned after Narathu's death in 1170 and resumed his high office. The next important personage to visit Ceylon was Uttarajiva who went to Ceylon in 1180 and is known in Burmese religious history as the 'First Pilgrim'; his companion Chapata, known as the Second Pilgrim, remained in Ceylon for ten years and returned to Burma in A. D. 1190 with four other monks "including Ananda of Conjeevaram and a prince of Cambodia." This Chapata created a schism in the Burmese Church.

His studies in Ceylon convinced Chapata that the Burmese were following a mistaken line of succession and the true line had been preserved only in Ceylon where the first monks, ordained by Mahendra, had kept up the succession unbroken; hence only those monks ordained by Sinhalese ecclesiastics were competent to ordain others, and in Pagan, Chapata declared, he and his



companions alone were qualified to ordain monks. So he advised those who wished to become real monks either to go to Ceylon or get themselves ordained by the Chapata group of monks in a special Chapel they built in Burma on Ceylonese model. The Burmese monks naturally resented this. They maintained that the true line of succession had been preserved in Burma just as well as in Ceylon; that Sona and Uttara, the missionaries of Asoka who preached Buddhism in Burma and ordained monks, were as competent as Mahendra, that the venerable Shin Arahin represented the true line of succession, and all Burmese monks were as good as Chapata and his four companions. This controversy shook all Burma, and the court had to interfere. Chapata, who was a singularly forceful personality, managed to convince Narapathisithu, the reigning monarch of Pagan, that he was right, and the court's decision in his favour had far reaching consequences not only for Burma but for all the Hinayana world. The prestige of both the king of Pagan and of Chapata was very high at the time and large number of Burmese Buddhists and those from neighbouring countries proceeded to Ceylon to receive valid ordination there, and Hinayana Buddhism became a popular international movement which looked to Ceylon as the seat of orthodoxy.

Chapata's claim of his own superior ordination did not long survive him. His disciples quarrelled among themselves and founded separate schools and with the fall of Pagan that took place shortly afterwards, the superiority of the Chapatan ordination vanished. But its effect and echoes lingered for a long time in Burma, Siam and Cambodia, and the ties between these countries and Ceylon were strengthened.

Narapathisithu's son and successor Htilominlo (1210-34) may be said to be the last of the great line of Burmese kings beginning from Anawrata. He was of a religious bent of mind and was so preoccupied with study and

building that the affairs of state were looked after by his four brothers who ruled jointly. Under Htilominlo, the study of Pali was intensely cultivated and even women "distinguished themselves for the skill and ardour which they displayed in conquering the difficulties of grammar." Htilominlo's reign was also noted for many buildings the most important of which was the Mahabodhi temple "an exact, but poor replica of the famous temple at Bodhgaya."

During the period, trading by Indian merchants was as brisk as ever and an inscription at Pagan mentions a Vishnu temple built there by the Nanadesi merchants, and a gift to the temple made "in the thirteenth century by a merchant from one of the port towns on the Malabar Coast."

#### RISE OF THE SHANS

The glory of Pagan vanished soon after, and its end was hastened by a Mongol invasion brought about by the madness of a Pagan king named Narathihapate. His interest in religion was confined to the building of the Mingalazedi Pagoda and putting up an inscription in it describing himself as the commander of "an army of 36 million soldiers, the swallower of 300 dishes of curry a day and the possessor of 3,000 concubines." This prodigy could not very well submit to Kublai Khan; so when the Khan's emissaries arrived in Pagan in 1271 asking for tributes, he refused to see them. Kublai Khan, after he conquered China, had checked up the list of vassals maintained in the Chinese Court and found the name of Burma in it; this was the reason why he had sent his emissary to Burma to demand tribute. On the emissaries of the Khan reporting to him the treatment they received in Pagan, the emperor sent a special envoy with a letter written by himself warning Narathihapate of the consequences if he failed to send tributes to China. This time the Burmese king received the envoys; on reading the letter, however, he executed the envoy and his retinue. Further, he

sent a punitive expedition against the little state of Kaungai on the Taping river that had submitted to the Mongols.

The inevitable followed. The Mongols started a series of invasions and practically the whole of Upper and Central Burma was occupied and Narathihapate was obliged to flee to Lower Burma. He now realised that he had misjudged the power of the Mongols and sent the Khan a letter of submission and started on his way to the capital. At Prome, however, he was murdered, in 1287.

Both the Mons and the Shans profited by the fall of Pagan. The Mons declared their independence and the Shans, who were rising in the north-east, consolidated their power by entering into diplomatic relations with the Mongols, and built up the Shan states.

These Shans were of the same stock as the Thais who penetrated from the north into the Menam valley and founded the kingdom of Siam, challenging the power of the Khmers and the Mons and crippling both. The Thais will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter. Suffice to say here that the Shans did not play an important part in Indo-Burmese cultural relations and that the history of Burma from the fall of Pagan was mainly the story of a triangular fight among the Shans, the Burmese and the Mons till the British put an effective end to these rivalries.

#### BURMESE GENIUS AND CHARACTER

The Burmese, while no great innovators in law and doctrine, were capable of creating great schisms on apparently trivial matters. The schism created by Chapata's claim of superiority of Sinhalese ordinations has already been mentioned. By the close of the eighteenth century another schism divided the Buddhist Church of Burma into Ekamsikas (single shouldered) and

Parupana (fully clad), and the trouble even spread to Ceylon. The whole question revolved on a sartorial point of wearing robes by monks. The old practice, it would appear, was for a monk to wear his robe, which consisted of a single piece of cloth, by wrapping it round the lower body from the loins to the ankles, to draw the end from the back over the left shoulder and, passing it across the breast to the right shoulder, leave it hanging behind on the right side. Some monks thought this too much of a trouble, and by the end of the seventeenth century started a fashion of wearing the robe in such a way as to leave the end hanging in front of the left shoulder, and the right shoulder bare. This sartorial heresy was resented by monks of the older persuasion but these could show no scriptural authority for their ancient practice; a reference was made to Mahavihara in Ceylon but no decision could be made by the Theras there. And what was worse, some of the Sinhalese monks followed the Ekamsikas whose practice was deemed more suitable for a hot climate and led to lesser trouble and cost of cloth.

The question was finally settled in 1784 by king Bodopaya who claimed himself to be a Bodhisatva but was considered mad by others. Bodopaya convened a conference of elders to finally decide the vexed question; the Ekamsikas were forced to admit that they had no scriptural authority for the practice while the Parupanas maintained that the weight of tradition was in their favour though they too could not adduce direct evidence and scriptural sanction. Bodopaya upheld the validity of the Parupana contention and issued a decree making the Parupana discipline compulsory on all monks.

This trouble, however, did not end here. In 1786 a learned monk named Atula, whose scholarship and ability were held in high esteem in all Hinayana countries, addressed a letter to Bodopaya stating that he had discovered in a work called *Culaganthipada*, composed by

Moggallana, the celebrated disciple of the Buddha, a passage sanctioning the Ekamsika practice. So ancient and honoured an authority as Moggallana could not be overlooked, and the whole question was re-opened. An expert committee was appointed to go through *Culaganthipada*; when this committee started work it was discovered that the learned Atula had read *Culaganthipada* in a hurry; for the work quoted Sinhalese commentaries and the author was found to be not the contemporary of the Buddha but a Sinhalese monk named Moggallana who lived in the thirteenth century of the Christian era. After this, the Ekamsikas were no more heard of.

Burma may be said to be the one country at present where Buddhism is widely practised to the exclusion of other religions. The Theravada school, as established in the time of Anawrata and strengthened by contact with Ceylon, is the popular religion of Burma and the influence of other religions is not considerable. It must, however, be noted that there is an element of ancient indigenous cults in the popular Buddhism of Burma and the most prominent feature of this element is the worship of spirits known as Nats. Most of these Nats have been Indianised and given names of the deities of the Hindu and Buddhist religions and are subordinate to the Buddha. Buddhism had been tolerant of Nat worship but at the same time watchful, and when any Nat shrine tended to become over-popular Buddhism suppressed it. The Shwezigion Pagoda built by Anawrata was mainly intended for enshrining the relics of the Buddha of which the most important were his "collar-bone, his frontlet bone and a tooth", but has shrines dedicated to the hierarchy of thirty seven Nats. When the king was asked why he allowed these barbarous images to be set up in a Buddhist shrine he is said to have replied: "Men will not come here for the sake of the new faith. Let them come for their old gods and gradually they will be won over." Later events have justified Anawrata's policy. For the thirty seven Nats at present

are but the Burmese parallel of the Buddhist pantheon of the thirty-three divinities of the Trayatimsa Heaven presided over by Indra or Saka. Some of the Nats can be easily distinguished, by their names and appearance, as Indian gods transferred to the Nat pantheon; of these mention may be made of Gawayamanda Nat (Vishnu), Sandi Nat-thami (Durga), and Mahawenne Nat (Ganesha).

In spite of this Nat worship and certain survivals of Brahmanic rituals and beliefs, Thera Vada Buddhism may be said to be the national religion of Burma and in no other country is it so thoroughly and widely practised. Every Burman is expected to live at least part of his life as a monk. He enters a monastery when he is about fifteen for a short stay. "Devout parents send their sons for the four months of Vassa or retreat (some for one season and others for three successive years during the season) but by the majority a period of one week to a month is considered sufficient. To omit this stay in a monastery altogether would not be respectable; it is in common esteem the only way to become a human being, for without it a boy is a mere animal..... In energy and morality, the Burmese monks seem, as a class, superior to their brethren in Ceylon and Siam, and their services to education and learning have been considerable. Every monastery is also a school."

Though the Burmans, thus, are strict Buddhists, they are one of the gayest peoples in the world; this should make us cautious in accepting the oft repeated charge against Buddhism that it is a pessimistic religion which tends to make its followers gloomy. Buddhism, in Burma at least, has made its adherents take a cheerful view of life.



## CHAPTER XIX

### SIAM

SIAM comes into the history of South East Asia comparatively late. The regions now known as Siam or Thailand was during the period of the Khmer ascendancy, a part of their empire and the population was mostly of Khmer or Mon extraction. Huien Tsang's account would indicate the existence of an independent kingdom between Cambodia and Pegu but the extent and power of this kingdom is not known.

### SUKHOTAI KINGDOM

The political importance of Siam starts with the incursions into these regions of the tribes that bore the racial name of Thai. Their homeland is traced to the southern borders of China from where they migrated towards the south. These migrations, unimportant and scattered at first assumed, by the thirteenth century, formidable proportions embracing all the regions of South East Asia from Assam to Laos. One wave of this movement led to the foundation of the Shan states already mentioned in the previous chapter. Another, pushing down the valley of the Menam took advantage of the weakening hold of the Khmers here and founded kingdoms in this region. In the year 1229 they defeated the Khmer commander of Sukhotai and founded here the first important Thai kingdom. The rise of Sukhotai is connected with the name of king Rama Khomheng. The exact period of his reign is not known but available evidence indicates that he ruled Sukhotai in the latter half of the thirteenth century.

The Thais were probably acquainted with Chinese Buddhism, but their cultural Gurus were the Khmers and Mons. The Thais were particularly remarkable for their adaptability, and they assimilated the best in Khmer and Mon civilisations. "By the trade route through Assam,

joining India and China, they also established contact with Buddhism in northern India and the influence of Buddhist and Sena art upon their own in the extreme north of the Menam basin is easily recognizable."

The Thais had a genius for diplomacy too. They always kept themselves on the right side of China; when Chinese emperors were powerful enough to impose their suzerainty over South East Asia, the Thais dutifully sent in their tributes. When a particular emperor or dynasty proved weak, the Thais acted independently but always had, when questioned from China, a valid excuse for their actions. By these methods the Thais expanded their power down the Menam valley, into the Malay Peninsula, which owed allegiance to the Sri Vijaya empire of the islands.

Rama Khomheng is a legendary figure. In an inscription found at Sukhotai, and now preserved in Bangkok, the king states that on the east his kingdom "extended to the banks of the Mekhong, and beyond it to Chava (Luang Prabang): on the south to the sea as far as Sri Dharmaraja or Ligor: and on the west to Hamsavati or Pegu." The Thai language was first reduced to writing during the reign of Rama Khomheng by borrowing and combining the Mon and Khmer scripts. The Thai assimilation of the cultures they came across is thus described by Coedes, an authority on the history and cultures of South East Asia: "From Cambodia the Siamese assimilated its political organisation, material civilisation, writing and a considerable number of words. Siamese artists learnt from Khmer artists and transformed Khmer art according to their own genius, under the influence of their contact with their western neighbours, the Mons and Burmese. From these latter the Siamese received their juristic traditions, of Indian origin, and above all Sinhalese Buddhism and its artistic traditions."

The Sukhotai inscription also gives an account of the progress of religion among the Thais. Buddhism was the



dominating religion and the season of Vassa or retreat was observed. The festival of Kathina was celebrated with processions, concerts and reading of scriptures. In the city were shrines well adorned with images. To the west of the city was a forest monastery presented by the king to a distinguished elder who was a native of Sri Dharma-raja and knew the whole Tripitaka by heart. Though Buddhism was thus the dominant religion, stress is also laid on the worship of Brahmanic deities and of indigenous spirits; the most important of the latter was P'ra Khap'ung who had his main shrine on a hill south of the city and the king made regular offerings there for enhancing the prosperity of the people.

The Chinese called Sukhotai, 'Sien' and the Khmers 'Syam' or dark from which Siam seems to have taken its name.

Rama Khomheng, tradition asserts, disappeared in the rapids of Menam near Sawankhalok in the second decade of the fourteenth century. After him the power of Sukhotai declined but a Khmer inscription mentions a Thai king named Sri Suryavamsa Rama who apparently ruled in Sukhotai in 1360 or thereabout. He was a man of learning proficient in the "*Tripitakas*, the *Vedas*, the *Saṣtragamas* and *Dharmanaya*" and had erected shrines to Mahesvara, and Vishnu as well as to the Buddha. In 1361 he sent envoys to Ceylon to get a Metropolitan or head of the Buddhist church and on arrival of this worthy in Sukhotai, the king was so overcome with religious emotion that he became a monk; only after repeated requests by the people did he leave the monastery and resume charge of his secular duties.

#### AYUTHIA

Whatever the merits of this king, the power of Sukhotai declined, and Ayuthia rose as the most important Thai kingdom. Its founder was a Thai chieftain who was crowned king in 1350 and assumed the regnal title of

Ramadhipathi. He is traditionally known as the first king of Siam.

The close proximity of Ayuthia to the Khmer capital of Angkor led to continued wars between the Siamese and the Cambodians and to the capture of Angkor by the former more than once only to be reconquered by the Cambodians. These Khmer-Thai political brawls had their effect on Siamese Buddhism. For an inscription found on a Shiva image and dated 1510 A. D. asserts the identity of Shiva and Buddha.

The growing power of Siam led to wars with the Burmese on her western frontier. Compelled to fight on two fronts, with the activities of rebellious chiefs thrown in, Siam's power started waning. In 1568 the Burmese conquered Ayuthia and led the Siamese king into captivity. But by the end of the century the country again recovered sufficiently to attract international activity, and we are told a large number of Japanese, who had settled down in Siam, helped the Thais to defeat the Burmese. European adventurers too found Siam a congenial soil for their activities, and in 1682 a Greek settler named Constantine Phaulcon became foreign minister of king Narai; he arranged for an exchange of embassies between Narai and Louis XIV of France, and the French king got the idea that the whole of Siam wished to embrace Christianity immediately. Christian missionaries were then sent to Siam but when these broached the subject of conversion, Narai stated that he found no reason why the Siamese should give up Buddhism which they had professed for 2,000 years and had stood them well.

In the constant wars with the Burmese, Ayuthia finally fell to Burma in 1767 and was laid waste, and most of its great temples destroyed. The ruined city is still seen, "and the jungles that now cover the site surround the remnants of the West Somarokot, in which is a gigantic bronze Buddha facing with scornful calm the ruin which threatens him."

## B A N G K O K

The Siamese now rallied to a leader of Chinese origin named Phaya Tak Sin, drove the Burmese out of the country and built Bangkok as their new capital. He fell out with the Buddhist clergy whom he considered corrupt, and claimed himself competent to reform the church. The monks resented this, fomented rebellion under a chief by name Chao Phaya Chakkri who deposed Phaya Tak Sin in 1782 and founded a new dynasty. The modern history of Siam starts from this event and descendants of Chao Phaya Chakkri have kept the line of kingship in Thailand.

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Though Siam received Thera Vada Buddhism from the Mons and Burmese, Khmer influence in art, architecture and religion was more prominent than the Burmese in early Siamese history. While Siam had no Brahmin Pontiffs like the Sivakaivalyas of Khmer, the court ceremonial was dominated by Brahmins who fixed lucky days and times, cast horoscopes, consulted omens and performed Pujas to both Hindu and Buddhist deities. In domestic worship and ceremonies too Brahmins were in demand. King Mongkut, a monk who took over the reins of government on his brother's death in 1851, brought about certain reforms in favour of Buddhism and from his time onwards Buddhist priests along with Brahmins superintended court ceremonial to ensure that the basic ideals of Buddhism were not overlooked or neglected by Brahmin ritualists.

Siamese have preserved in palm leaf manuscripts traditions of Brahmin migrations from India into Siamese territory. The date of these manuscripts is not ascertained, but it embodies early traditions current among the people before Siamese conquest. It would appear from these writings that due to extensive political disturbances in north India in the eighth century large scale migrations of Brahmins took place. Four entire Gotras of Brahmins were

said to have gone to the eastern countries and settled down in Pegu, Pagan, the Laos states, Siam and Cambodia. "Those coming into Siam went partly to the north west and settled down in Sukotairajatan and Lawo (present Lopburi), others went from Pegu to Tanawassi (Tenasarim) and across to Pechaburi, and still others came to Lakhon where they built a temple and erected their Sao Ching Cha or posts for the swinging ceremony. These pillars still exist in the town as a proof that the Brahmins came to Lakhon before they reached Bangkok."

The swinging ceremony is even now a characteristically Brahmin festival of Siam lasting for two days. It is a harvest thanksgiving ritual. "Under the supervision of a high state official, four Brahmins wearing tall conical hats swing on a board suspended from a huge frame about 100 ft. high. Their object is to catch with their teeth a bag of money hanging a little distance from the swing. Where three or four sets of swingers have obtained a prize in this way, they conclude the ceremony by sprinkling the ground with holy water carried in bullock horns. Swinging is one of the earliest Indian rites and as part of the worship of Krishna it has lasted to the present day".

Another festival reminiscent of the ancient Ploughing Rites of India is the Rek Na or Ploughing Festival of Siam. In Buddhist scriptures, it may be recalled, a Ploughing Festival by Suddhodhana is related, and in the *Ramayana* king Janaka is said to have found Sita in the field while he was performing the Ploughing Ceremony. In Siam, the king does not do the ploughing himself, but the minister of agriculture does it on his behalf; this worthy is escorted in procession to a royal park outside Bangkok where he ploughs a plot with a pair of white oxen. The ploughing festival, it may be related, was also an imperial ceremony in China.

While the Siamese borrowed much from the Khmers, it may be noted that they were mainly responsible for

introducing Thera Vada Buddhism into Cambodia where it found a ready welcome among the people.

Though the Siamese came late into the history of South East Asia, they are not behind any other country in claiming hoary antiquity for their Buddhism. An inscription of fourteenth century indicates that a cutting of the Bo-tree was brought from Ceylon and certain relics from Bihar. But the most fantastic Siamese claim is that the Buddha not only visited Siam but died there. At Praten, a little to the north of the present Phra: Pathom, a slab of rock under great trees is pointed out as the exact spot where he obtained Parinirvana and a mark in the rocks, now known as Phra: Bat in the hills north of Ayuthia, is shown as a foot print of the Buddha.

#### HINDU SURVIVALS

As curious survivals of Brahminism may be mentioned some of the "Samskaras" or domestic ceremonies of the Hindus which are still performed in Siam. In India the Samskaras are twelve; "of these only three or four are kept by the nations of Indo-China, namely the shaving of the first hair of a child a month after birth, the giving of a name, and the piercing of the ears for ear-rings. This last is observed in Burma and Laos, but not in Siam and Cambodia, where it is substituted by Kon Chuck or shaving of the top-knot which is allowed to grow until the eleventh or thirteenth year. This ceremony, which is performed on boys and girls alike, is the most important event in the life of a young Siamese and is celebrated by well-to-do parents with lavish expenditure. The indigent often avail themselves of the royal bounty, for each year a public ceremony is performed in one of the temples of Bangkok at which poor children receive the tonsure gratis..... These ceremonies are of considerable interest as showing how closely Buddhist and Brahmanic rites are intertwined in Siamese family life."

Other vestiges of Brahmanic influences are also found in Siam. The royal temple at Bangkok contains illustrations from the *Ramayana*, and the Brahmanic pantheon has supplied a multitude of motifs to the painter and the sculptor, the popular figures being Phra: Narai (Narayana or Vishnu) riding on Garuda, Phra: Isuen (Shiva) riding on a bull, Phra: In (Indra) and Yomma: Rat (Yama). There is a story current in Siam that there was a contest for supremacy between Shiva and Buddha in which the latter won. Each tried to make himself invisible to the other; Shiva could not do this, but the Buddha sat on Shiva's head and won the contest. The story is narrated to explain a curious figure, found in certain Siamese shrines, in which the Buddha sits on Shiva's head; the figure is obviously a survival of the Shiva-Buddha cult of South East Asia, and the story would indicate the ultimate dominance of Buddhism over Shaivism. Further, some Buddhist shrines retain Lingas, and when the "top-knot of a Siamese prince is cut off, part of the ceremony consists in his being received by the king dressed as Shiva on the summit of a mount cut in the traditional shape of Mt. Kailas."

Like the Nats of Burma, Siam has a spirit population of Phis but the Phis are less organised than the Nats and there is no Siamese parallel to the Burmese hierarchy of 37 Nats. But in the villages the Phis are still quite popular, and find, like the Nats, niches in the Buddhistic pantheon.

In spite of these Brahmanical survivals and partiality to Phis. Theravada Buddhism, as in Burma, is the national religion of Siam and the most potent living force.

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## CHAPTER XX

### CHINA

INDIAN cultural expansion to the countries so far mentioned can be easily explained. South East Asia at the time of Indian overseas expansion was inhabited by primitive peoples with no civilisation of their own and they readily accepted Indian religions, social theories, art, architecture and literature when these were brought to them by missionaries, adventurers, merchants and colonists. But the case of China is different.

From pre-historic times China had built up, without any aid from India or the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf centres of culture, a civilisation of her own. Great deserts, impassable mountains and wild tribes that roved the Central Asian regions prevented China from coming into active contact with the ancient civilisations of India and the west, yet she had developed sound ideas of statecraft, law and religious beliefs; she had a peculiar script and a classical literature that was the pride of the court and the learned. The minor races that came in contact with them generally looked to the Chinese for cultural guidance. As a rule, the Chinese considered themselves superior to foreigners, claimed for themselves a celestial origin and the emperor was known as the Son of Heaven competent to superintend the affairs of deities. As such it is interesting, if not surprising, how this great country allowed itself to be influenced by Indian religion and culture. And the situation becomes all the more intriguing when we consider the fact that India herself did not take the initiative but China came to India in search of Indian religion.

Anyway China was the only civilised country of the ancient world into which Indian culture spread and developed. We have seen that Asoka had sent organised missions to practically all the countries of the west as far

as Egypt and Macedonia, but in none of these countries did Buddhism make any headway.

There was, however, one good reason why China sought the aid of India. The Chinese were never deep in religion. In spite of their old civilisation, they had not developed that weariness with life, which is the essence of Indian religions, and that spirit of enquiry into something greater than life. Confucianism was mainly concerned with traditional good conduct, correct behaviour, court ceremonial and respect for ancestors. Taoism, no doubt, had the nucleus of a great religion in it and Lao Tse, its founder, was a man of deeper spiritual insight than his contemporary Confucius. But Tao, the universal spirit of Lao Tse, lacked the strength and intensity of the Atman of the Hindus; the ideal Taoist philosopher was a carefree wanderer who lived in tune with nature; if he fled from the city it was to free himself from man-made social bonds and not for salvation [from life. The lesser Taoist, the priest, loved the good things of life and was mainly concerned with controlling the spirit world for the benefit of man and concocting the Elixir of Immortality, an expensive magic potion that was believed to make its swallower live for ever. Neither Taoism nor Confucianism could shake off the essential pragmatism of the Chinese mind, and both showed reluctance to investigate the origin and end of life or to probe the reality that lay beyond the phenomenal world. Chinese religious literature has nothing similar to that passionate search for reality that forms the main burden of the Upanishads or to that relentless search for truth that made Gautama a Buddha.

The Chinese attitude towards the religious life is best illustrated in the words of Confucius who asked his followers to respect the spirits and sacrifice to them, but to keep away from them. It was considered bad form for a person to evince unnecessary curiosity concerning the activities of spirits and enquire into them. Such an



attitude could not, for obvious reasons, evolve a religion of the type of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, and the Chinese never claimed that they had a message for the redemption of humanity; nor did they think it their duty to preach Confucianism or Taoism in foreign countries. Hence they were quite interested when they learnt that India had a universal message.

A curious parallel to the spread of Buddhism in China can be found in the rapid progress of Christianity in Rome and other European countries. The Hellenistic culture, though the pride of Europe, was particularly wanting in religious fervour, and when Christianity was introduced to Rome it spread so rapidly as to alarm the Roman emperors who resorted to persecution in spite of which it flourished.

#### HUANG TI AND LI SZE

We have seen that the Mauryans who had diplomatic and cultural relations with most of the civilised countries of their time had not established contact with China. The reason for this is not far to seek. China was, during Asoka's time, divided into many states and had not emerged as a first rate power. But soon after Asoka's death, there rose in China a strong ruler who ascended the throne in 221 B. C, broke the power of the numerous petty chiefs, unified China and became its first emperor. He was Huang Ti, the ruler of the state of Ch'in. This great man in Chinese history is best known for two of his activities: Burning the classics and building the Great Wall.

Huang Ti and his minister Li Sze form a curious parallel to Chandragupta Maurya and his tutor-minister Chanakya. Like Chanakya, Li Sze believed that the greatest good to the largest number of individuals could be effected by an extensive empire ruled by a strong dictatorial monarch; both had scant respect for traditions

and rejected all pious theories of statecraft that stood in the way of expanding and consolidating the power of the state; and both ministers had energetic and able rulers who vigorously put into practice the theories they advocated and ruthlessly put down all opposition from whichever quarter it came.

When Huang Ti ascended the throne of the little state of Ch'in, China was divided into numerous petty kingdoms, all quarrelling among themselves; the kings were not autocrats, and their policies were generally controlled by trade interests ascertained through guilds, by oligarchs, and above all by a council of Confucian scholars. One of the adverse effects of the absence of a strong centrally organised kingdom was the incursions into the country of wild tribes that roved the borders of China; they plundered the border states as they pleased and disappeared into the wilds before resistance could be organised by the numerous states. Hence Huang Ti realised that the only chance of survival for China was to scrap the little states and build up an extensive empire, powerful enough to guard all the borders from nomad attacks and if possible to carry the war into the homelands of the nomads and completely destroy or overcome them.

With this end in view Huang Ti, ably assisted by Li Sze, started a policy of aggrandizement, when he came into conflict with the Confucian literati. The king's new policy was freely discussed in a Council of Seventy Doctors in which Li Sze was present. The proceedings of the discussion have been preserved in Chinese annals. Huen-yu-yuch, as the spokesman of the seventy two doctors, after a lengthy speech on the excellence of Confucian classics, and an able criticism of the king's policy concluded: "Actions that are not based on ancient ways can never last long". Li Sze replied the learned doctor, defending the king's policy. His defence reads strangely modern: "The scholars of the present", said

he, "are concerned more with the past and do not look round to see what is happening in their own times. The books of the past were written for an age the conditions of which have altered. As such the classics were good enough for people who lived at the time of Confucius and others, but not for the present generation that live under different conditions." The Council of Seventy Doctors could not agree with this, but maintained that the Confucian classics were meant for all time, and if they were good enough for Confucius, they must be good enough for Huang Ti and Li Sze.

Huang Ti and Li Sze realised the difficulty of convincing scholars by argument, and as a preliminary step towards expanding and consolidating the power of China ordered a general burning of books. Every person in China was to surrender all his books to his district officer for burning, and non-compliance was declared high treason punishable by death; only books on medicine were exempt. Some responsible individuals at the court pointed out that it would be difficult under these conditions for people to know what was good and evil, what was right and wrong. On this, another imperial edict was issued making district authorities competent to give advice on right conduct, and any citizen who did not know how to act in a given situation was asked to seek the guidance of civil administrative officers.

These imperial decrees seem to have been enforced with vigour, and we are told that four hundred scholars who loved their classics more than their lives were buried alive; this is probably an exaggeration as later scholars have all evinced a peculiar pleasure in depicting Huang Ti and his minister as monsters. Anyway, the Chinese classics now extant are believed to be those preserved from destruction by dishonest scholars who hid their books from Huang Ti's officers.

The loss of four hundred scholars did not, at any rate, hinder Huang Ti's plans. His enterprizes proved

eminently successful and he became the first emperor of China. His energetic and purposeful nature is best in evidence in the building of the Great Wall against nomad incursions, one of the most stupendous enterprizes ever conceived and executed by man. For while the great kings of the ancient and medieval world were content to build walls round their cities, Huang Ti almost enclosed an empire in a wall which stretched from Central Asia to the sea along a route of 1,500 miles.

### THE HANS

Huang Ti's victory in the Battle of Books had certain salutary effects on Chinese history. It showed the literati that there were points of view in the world other than the Confucian, so much so that when the Hans overthrew the dynasty of Book Burners, (as Huang Ti's line is known in China) and revived the classics, they could follow with vigour all the policies of Huang Ti, (with the exception of book burning) without any opposition from the scholars. The ideal of the empire had come to stay in China. Further, it was in all probability the destruction of fanaticism that went with the burning of books, that was responsible for the absence of opposition when the Han emperor decided to seek spiritual aid from India.

The Han dynasty was the first in China to cultivate foreign relations. Embassies between the Hans and many foreign powers are mentioned in Chinese annals and even Rome is included in the list. Han foreign diplomacy started for strategic purposes. For the emperors found that the Great Wall was not completely successful in staying hostile nomad incursions into China and they wished to form alliances with Central Asian kingdoms in order to catch and destroy the wild tribes between China and Central Asia. The rising power of Yue-Che, a Central Asian tribe, gave great hopes to the Hans, and in 138 B. C. an able Chinese general, Chang K'ein, was despatched to visit the Yue-Che capital and broach the subject of an

alliance with China. Chang K'ein, as soon as he crossed the borders of China, fell into a trap set by hostile tribes, but his resourcefulness saved him from death; what story he told of his mission is not known, but he was treated well by the tribes. In fact he gained their confidence so completely that he married and settled down among them. After ten years' stay, however, when vigilance of the tribes slackened he escaped into the Yue-Che country. It was while in this country that he saw the products of South China sold in its markets (page 262).

Chang K'ien submitted an exhaustive report to the emperor on the people of Central Asia, of the nomads and their habits, and the Hans working on this information were able to wage successful war on the tribes and push the western borders of China far into Central Asia. Contact with Central Asia naturally acquainted the Chinese with Indian culture and religions, and this led the Hans to open contacts with India especially as this country was reckoned in Central Asia as the mother of civilisation.

There were certain diplomatic niceties which prevented the Hans from sending a political mission to India. In China, every envoy that came from a foreign country was considered the representative of a vassal seeking Chinese aid and the presents he brought were entered in the imperial archives as tribute. But about India the Chinese knew little except that it was a great country whose cultural dominion extended far and wide. In short, they did not know whether to treat her as a vassal, an equal or a superior. So the first Chinese mission to India brought no presents but only a beautiful story. This story was that the reigning emperor Ming Ti had a dream in which he saw a golden man come flying into his palace, and the court interpreters of the dream declared that the golden man was the Indian god Fo-to or the Buddha; the emperor wished to know something about Fo-to and his teachings. The traditional date of the dream is 62 A. D., and the mission arrived in India shortly afterwards.

The Chinese must have found India disappointing. The political conditions in India at the time was not in keeping with her great fame as the civiliser of mankind; the empire of Kanishka had not yet risen and North India was, at the time, the cockpit of warring Scythians. There was no great kingdom or personality in India at the time, and it is not known to which court in India the Chinese mission came. All that is known about this first Chinese mission to India is that it returned to China with a monk named Kasyapa Matanga, a native of Central India, and a load of books. In Central Asia Kasyapa was joined by another monk named Dharmaraksha, of Indian extraction.

The two monks impressed the Chinese. For their load of books was heavy and white horses carried them. It is significant that the monastery built for the monks at Loyang, the Han capital, was called the White Horse Monastery, the first Buddhist establishment in China. The books Kasyapa took with him were Sanskrit texts, and this would indicate that the Mahayana was the prevailing fashion in India.

Anyway Ming Ti's curiosity concerning the 'Golden Man' was satisfied with the building of the White Horse Monastery; for he remained a staunch Confucian and showed little interest in Buddhism. Chu Ying, Ming Ti's brother, it would appear, was converted to Buddhism but his activities did not advance the cause of Buddhism; for he led an unsuccessful rebellion against the emperor and committed suicide. The two monks, however, laboured quietly on the work of translation and they are said to have translated a large number of Sanskrit books into Chinese; but only one, called the *Sutra of Forty Two Sections* is now extant. It is a Buddhist catechism setting forth the basic doctrines and the rules of discipline for the monastic community.

The Han emperors did not care much for Buddhism. They followed a mixture of Confucianism and Taoism with

aboriginal cults thrown in, believed in magic and exorcism and "continued old practices of consulting tortoise-shells and chicken-bones for oracles, and of animal sacrifices in high places and spent great sums on alchemy and spiritualism". The White Horse Monastery, however, attracted considerable attention. The Han period was an age of translation rather than of proselytism. We hear of a good many scholars who came to China from India and a greater number from Central Asia.

The main kingdoms of Central Asia at the time were Kashghar in the west, Kuchi, Karashahr, Turfan and Hami lying successively to the north-east, and Yarkand, Khotan and Miran to the south-east; all these were, in effect, city states with which China had political contacts. These kingdoms along with Kashmir were, in the early centuries of the Christian era, a single cultural unit with Buddhism as the main religion. Since Kanishka's time Kashmir had risen as a great centre of Buddhist learning and many Central Asian monks came to Kashmir for higher studies, and learned men from Kashmir were in great demand in the rising cultural centres of Central Asia. All these regions felt the might of the Hans and thought it desirable to win over China to Buddhism. With this end in view many scholars and missionaries from Central Asia and India travelled to China, and the White Horse Monastery became a well-known centre of learning.

An important personage who visited the White Horse Monastery in the second century of the Christian era was Ngan Sho-kao. He was a Central Asian prince; the exact principality he ruled is not known but he is said to have abdicated in favour of a relative, joined the Sangha and travelled to the White Horse Monastery where he settled down to the work of translation. He obtained for the monastery the services of several scholars from Central Asia and India, and founded a regular school of translators known in Chinese as the "Uurivalled". Central Asia, as the meeting place of several races and cultures, was

particularly rich in polyglot studies, and one Central Asian monk named Fa-hu (Dharmaraksha) who settled down in China in the third century A. D. is said to have gained proficiency in thirty six languages. Before the downfall of the Han dynasty late in the third century A. D., 350 Sanskrit works had been translated into Chinese.

#### THE AGE OF THREE KINGDOMS

After the fall of the Hans, China entered the romantic age of Three Kingdoms (Wei, Wu and Shu); though an epoch of political instability and everchanging frontiers and dynasties, Buddhism gained considerable ground during this period. The Tartar hordes who made inroads into China, first patronised Buddhism and then embraced it, and by the time the T'angs unified China in the seventh century and revived her imperial glory, Buddhism was considered not an alien cult but something of a national religion on a par with Confucianism and Taoism though its original inspiration came from outside China.

Some great names are connected with the rise of Buddhism in China during the unsettled times that intervened between the fall of the Han empire and the rise of the T'angs. One of them was the celebrated scholar and saint Kumarajiva. His father Kumarayana had migrated from India and settled down in Kuchi marrying a princess of this city state. When her son was nine years of age she brought him to Kashmir for his education. After completing his studies, Kumarajiva returned to his native city and won great fame in Central Asia as a scholar of unrivalled ability and saintliness. In 383 A. D. the Chinese invaded Kuchi, captured Kumarajiva and took him to China. The scholar saint, indifferent to such human follies as invasions and captures, made himself as well at home in China as in Kuchi. He studied Chinese and translated several Sanskrit works. He was particularly deep in the philosophy of Buddhism and was easily the greatest interpreter of Buddhism to the Chinese, and his writings and lectures



had great influence in spreading Buddhism in China. Kumarajiva's captor, General Lu Kuang, it may be mentioned, carved out a principality for himself in those turbulent days of China and became the ruler of a state known as Southern Liang, and actively patronised Kumarajiva and his activities.

Kumarajiva is credited with having translated fifty works. "He was appointed Kuo Shih or Director of Public Instruction and lectured in a hall specially built for him". His disciples numbered three thousand.

Another important personage whose name is connected with popularising Buddhism in China was the celebrated Chinese scholar Tao-Ngan. He was an eminent Confucian who embraced Buddhism and worked for the spread of this religion with the zeal of a neophyte. He had disciples and adherents all over China; he trained them for missionary work and sent them to different parts of the country to preach the Law of the Buddha. A good linguist and critic, "he was the first to examine critically the ancient Chinese translations of Buddhist texts and to compile a series of commentaries in order to bring out the inner meaning of Buddhist doctrines." The earlier translations, we are told, were inaccurate and faulty, and it was he who made them intelligible to the later generations.

Tao Ngan also invited monks from Central Asia and India to China and from the information collected from them he compiled a book on India "in order to encourage Chinese monks to go to India and learn Buddhism at first hand". This work produced considerable interest about India among the Chinese, and Tao Ngan's vigorous propaganda may be said to have started the great era of Chinese pilgrimage to India the torch-bearer of which was Fa Hien. From now on, right down to the Muslim period, more Chinese scholars and pilgrims came to India than Indians who went to China. Tao Ngan died in the

year 385, and by the time of his death, Buddhism had become the most important religion in China and had been introduced into Korea as the flower of Chinese civilisation. At this time, we are told, nine-tenths of the inhabitants of north-western China were Buddhists.

Rulers of many states in China had become Buddhists and actively patronised it. Even the imperial line could not escape the influence of Buddhism. For Hsiao Wu-Ti, the ninth sovereign of the Eastern Tsin dynasty (317-420) that represented the legitimate empire accepted Buddhism, and is known in Chinese history as the first Buddhist emperor of China.

Buddhism also began to influence Chinese literature and art. The sculptured grottos of Yun Kang, considered to be the oldest specimens of surviving Buddhist art in China, date from the fifth century of the Christian era. "In 471, a ruler of the state of Wei, Toba Aund, had a gigantic image of the Buddha constructed, and subsequently abdicated in order to devote himself to Buddhist studies". The famous Tun Huang Grottos also date from the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era and were, till the fourteenth century, an important monastic centre of Buddhism. The Lungmen Grottos of Loyang, one of the most famous cave temples in the world, appear to have been founded in the fifth century too. All told, early Chinese Buddhist shrines generally followed the lead of Karle, Kanheri and Ajanta and Indian monks were probably the originators of the idea.

#### BODHIDHARMA AND CH'AN BUDDHISM

The accession of Wu Ti (502-549) the first emperor of the Liang dynasty marked a new era for Buddhism in China. The emperor was at first a Confucian but was converted to Buddhism by a monk named Pao-Chih. The neophyte was an ardent Buddhist and claimed to be a

monk in royal garb. He emulated Asoka in piety and zeal for the law. A strict vegetarian, his respect for life was so great that he forbade the use of human and animal figures in embroidery lest people, in cutting up cloth, should become callous to the sanctity of life.

It was during Wu Ti's reign that the Indian saint Bodhidharma settled down in China. Next to the Buddha, he is the most revered Indian in the Far East, and as the founder of the Dhyana School ( Chinese Ch'an ), which at present flourishes in Japan as the 'Zen', is a living force. In Indian literature there is no record of him and what information is available of this interesting and eccentric personality is entirely from Chinese sources.

Bodhidharma was a prince of Conjeevaram who became a monk and preached a Buddhism of his own. He maintained that the conventional ideas and practices brought no merit but only burdens. What was needed was not worshipping the Buddhas or Bodhisatvas, reading the scriptures, going on pilgrimages, or even the observance of strict monastic discipline, but intensive Dhyana or meditation; illumination burst upon the meditating saint with the suddenness of lightning when he least expected it, and on this account the Dhyana teaching is also known as the Sudden or Abrupt Doctrine.

The Abrupt Doctrine, however, did not have much appeal for Indian Buddhists and Bodhidharma left his country, possibly in despair, for China. He embarked at Conjeevaram, then a flourishing Pallava port, and after a voyage of three years landed at Canton in the year 520. He was then far advanced in years, if we are to believe the Chinese tradition which maintains that he lived to an age of 150 years.

Bodhidharma's fame had preceded him, and emperor Wu Ti who was then at Nanking immediately sent for the sage. The first and only encounter of Bodhidharma with

Wu Ti has been recorded by the Chinese for the benefit of future generations. When Bodhidharma arrived at the court, the pious emperor, wishing to know where exactly he stood in the estimation of sages and gods, addressed him thus: "Your reverence! I have practised the Law for many years, built numerous shrines, forbidden the taking of life throughout my kingdom and have the Pitakas edited for the first time in China. How much merit have I accumulated by these pious actions?"

"None;" was the curt reply of the sage.

When the emperor found breath he asked again: "What is the greatest of the holy doctrines?"

"The Void, Abysmal Void;" said Bodhidharma.

The emperor now asked a very pertinent question: "If all is the Void, who are you?"

"I don't know:" said the enigmatic saint, and walked out of the imperial presence.

Bodhidharma was obviously an adherent of the Mādhyamika school of Buddhist philosophy, propounded by Nagarjuna, with its emphasis on Sunya or the Void as reality. Anyway, Wu Ti and Bodhidharma did not meet again and each practised Buddhism in his own way. Chinese accounts show Bodhidharma as a queer individual whose eccentricities had considerably affected the sect he founded. Leaving Nanking, the missionary went to Lo-yang and lived in the Shao Lin temple; he is said to have sat nine years gazing on a wall in the temple, and on this account was nicknamed the Wall Gazer.

In the meantime the fame of Bodhidharma had spread all over China and many zealots wished to become his disciples. But Bodhidharma had no use of disciples and took no notice of enquirers or seekers after truth, and sat immersed in contemplation of the wall. At last a persistent

Confucian, named Shen Kuang, succeeded in distracting Bodhidharma's attention from the wall. Seven days and seven nights Shen Kuang stood in snow in sight of Bodhidharma and when this failed to achieve his end, Shen Kuang drew the sword he was carrying, hewed off one of his own hands and presented it to the meditating saint. Bodhidharma was now impressed and asked Shen Kuang what exactly he wanted.

"Your reverence," said Shen Kuang, "I have been seeking peace of soul all my life but have not found it. Pray, pacify my soul".

"Produce your soul;" said Bodhidharma.

"Alas!" moaned Shen Kuang, "I cannot find my soul."

"There," cried Bodhidharma, "I have pacified your soul". At that moment Shen Kuang became suddenly illumined, and Bodhidharma took him as his disciple.

The Ch'an sect believes in patriarchal succession and has preserved the names of 28 Buddhist Patriarchs of India; Bodhidharma was the twenty-eighth and the last in India and with his going to China, the Ch'an see was naturally transferred to China where he is reckoned as the first patriarch. On the death of Bodhidharma, patriarchal succession continued in China but the sixth patriarch Hui-neng abolished the patriarchate in the eighth century due to a dispute in succession. Anyway the eccentricity of the founder was reflected in Ch'an discipline and doctrine, and a disciple who sought enlightenment from a master often got blows by way of instruction.

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In the year 538 A. D., it is stated a hair of the Buddha, twelve feet long, was brought to Wu Ti from the king of

Funan. Next year Wu Ti sent to India a mission to bring Sanskrit works. This mission returned to China in 546 with a large collection of Buddhist texts and an Indian savant named Paramartha who spent twenty years in translating them.

Wu Ti's son Yuan Ti (552-555) was a man of learning with Taoist inclinations. His library contained 140,000 volumes; he was in his library when an invading army of the neighbouring state of Wei marched on his capital. Finding learning useless against militarists, he burnt his library and submitted to Wei.

#### THE T'ANG DYNASTY

The Sui dynasty tried to unite all China and revive the past glory of the Hans; their success was partial but the period was favourable to Buddhism. The Sui's tried to rally Chinese nationalism around Buddhism and the annals of the dynasty record that under them Buddhist books had become more numerous than those of Confucians, and that "no less than three collections of the Tripitaka were made" during their sway. It was, however, given to the T'angs to realise the Sui dream of re-uniting China, and they built an empire even more glorious than that of the Hans.

The founder of the T'ang dynasty was a Sui General who successfully revolted and ascended the throne in 618. Throughout the T'ang period we find a triangular fight between Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism for imperial favour, and at the end of the T'ang rule we find the three persuasions just as strong as they were before, none having been ousted by the others. The emperors, generally speaking, held the balance between the three.

The first T'ang emperor Kao Tsu (618-627) was of a Confucian leaning and was guided by Fu I, one of his ministers, who wrote ten books against Buddhism.

Another minister, Hsiao Yu, an ardent Buddhist, wrote two books against Fu I's ten, in which he prophesied that Fu I's soul would go to hell. Subsequently a story became current in China that Fu I during a fainting fit had a vision of hell and, on recovery, became convert to Buddhism. The Confucians, however, maintain that he remained a Confucian all his life and on his deathbed warned his son against turning Buddhist.

It was during the reign of Tai Tsung the third ruler of the T'ang dynasty that the pilgrim Huien Tsang returned from India. Tai Tsung was not a Buddhist, but the pilgrim was given a public welcome, as we have already seen. He also wrote a preface to Huien Tsang's translation of the *Prajnanaparimita*.

The T'ang emperors, good statesmen as a rule, were unsteady in religion; some were Buddhists, others Taoists or Confucians. The dowager empress Wu who ascended the throne shortly after Tai Tsung's death was a devout Buddhist and had a bonze named Huai Ti as her principal adviser. She often styled herself as Kuan Yin, the lady Bodhisatva of China.

In the eighth century two important Buddhist missionaries arrived in China from India. They were Vajrabodhi and his pupil Amogha. This was a time when Mahayana was making a desperate attempt to regain the ground it had lost to Brahminism by making Buddhism all things to all men; Padmasambhava was converting Buddhism to suit the genius of the Tibetans, and in East India Tantric schools were successfully competing with the similar Sakti cults of Hinduism. Amogha seems to have been a Tantric wizard; anyway, it was not the sex or terror cults of Tantric Buddhism that he introduced to China but a cult of ancestor worship, dear to the Chinese. He developed elaborate ceremonies in honour of the dead, and seems to have established the Feast of All Souls which is observed in China on the fifteenth day of the seventh month every

year. Amogha is said to have translated 110 Sanskrit works into Chinese. It would appear that he wanted to return to India, but the emperor thought him indispensable to the Court and hence permission was refused. So he remained in China till his death which took place in 774.

The favour Buddhism enjoyed naturally evoked considerable antagonism both from Confucians and Taoists. Confucianism generally posed itself as the champion of Chinese nationalism and attacked Buddhism as alien, borrowed and ill fitting. A memorial by a celebrated Confucian scholar and statesman named Han Yu, preserved in the imperial archives, clearly sets forth the Confucian attitude towards Buddhism. The occasion for Han Yu's protest was the public honour paid to a relic of the Buddha which was brought from Fa-men monastery in Shen-si in 814 A. D. and housed in the imperial palace from where it was to be taken in procession to the principal monasteries of the city. Han Yu's memorial, *inter alia*, states: "This Buddha was a foreigner. His language was not the language of China. His clothes were of an alien cut. He did not utter the maxim of our ancient rules, nor conform to the customs which they handed down. He did not appreciate the bond between prince and minister, the tie between father and son. Had this Buddha come to our capital in the flesh, Your Majesty might have received him with a few words of admonition, giving him a banquet and a suit of clothes, before sending him out of the country with an escort of soldiers.

"And now what is happening? The bone of this man, long since dead and decomposed is to be admitted within the precincts of the imperial palace. Confucius had declared: 'Respect spiritual beings but keep them at a distance'. And so when princes of old paid visits of condolence, it was customary to send a magician in advance with a peach rod in his hand, to expel all noxious influences before the arrival of his master. Yet now Your



Majesty is about to introduce without reason, an obnoxious object personally taking part in the proceedings without the magician or his wand..... Of the officials no one has raised his voice against it; of the Censors not one has pointed out the enormity of such an act. Therefore, your servant, overwhelmed with shame for the Censors, implores Your Majesty that these bones may be handed over for destruction by fire or water, whereby the root of this great evil may be exterminated for all time, and the people may know how much the wisdom of Your Majesty surpasses that of ordinary men".

Han Yu, it would appear, had overestimated the wisdom of His Majesty; the emperor did not destroy the bones but almost killed Han Yu on the spot.

While this was the temper of Confucian antagonism, the methods of Taoists were different and closely resembled those of Brahmins. The Taoists borrowed a good part of the literature and doctrines of Buddhism, gave these Taoist garbs and declared that Buddhists were merely false imitators of Taoism. They even maintained that the Buddha was an incarnation of Lao Tse and had preached doctrines in India suited to Indians which were not so good as the originals taught in China. This sort of propaganda caused considerable confusion among the people, and even some of the emperors who were Taoists believed it. Emperor Wu Tsung, for instance, promulgated an edict in 843 by which he suppressed Buddhism in all China and ordered the destruction of 86,000 Buddhist shrines, the secularisation of 260,500 monks and nuns. But such grand programmes could not be worked out in a day and no sooner had he started his vandalism than he died of taking the Elixir of Immortality. Wu Tsung's uncle Hsung Tsung succeeded him; he started as a devout Buddhist and cancelled his predecessor's edict of iconoclasm and put to death the Taoist priests who instigated it. Later, however, he repented, turned Taoist and died of drinking the Elixir of Immortality.

The T'ang empire started degenerating by the beginning of the tenth century; disintegration set in and the menace of the wild men from the north and west, the ever present danger of a weak China, began to gain momentum. Towards the close of the century the Sung Dynasty tried to revive the glories of the T'angs without success. Tartar hordes were carving kingdoms out of the frontier provinces of China; one of these known as Khitans rose into considerable power, and the Chinese, in alliance with another, known as Kins or Golden Tartars, broke them, only to be harassed by their erstwhile allies the Kins. The Mongols now came on the scene and under their famous leader Chengiz Khan, started a career of conquest. The Sung emperor in 1232 entered into an alliance with them and broke the power of the Kins. China, however, made a mistake for the second time; for in 1280 the Mongols invaded China and their Khan Kublai became the emperor of all China.

#### THE MONGOL AND LATER DYNASTIES

The Mongols were acquainted with Buddhism. Padma-sambhava, as we shall see in the next chapter, had founded Lamaism in Tibet in the eighth century. The Mongols had contact with Tibet and developed a respect for the Lamas who were reckoned great wizards by the more superstitious of the Mongols. Chengiz Khan himself was not much affected by Lamaism or any other religion; he was a believer in one God and one emperor, as suited his military genius. Kublai, however, thought well of Lamaism and even before he conquered China had, as his religious adviser, a Lama named Bashpa. In 1261 Kublai Khan was formally initiated into the mysteries of Lamaism, and after his conquest of China Bashpa was made the head of the Buddhist Church in China. Lamaist establishments were founded in several parts of China and honoured along with other Buddhist schools. Taoism, however, seems to have suffered a reverse during the Mongol

period. For it was now the turn of Buddhists to expose the deceptions practised by the Taoists, and on a scrutiny of Taoist scriptures it was noticed that practically all had interpolations from Buddhist sources. Kublai Khan is credited with having issued an edict ordering the burning of all Taoist texts except *Tao-te-ching*, attributed to Lao Tse himself. The persecution of Taoists does not appear to have gone any further.

The Mongols were driven out of China by the native Ming dynasty which reigned from 1368 till 1644. The Mings, though generally guided by Confucian nationalism showed marked favour to Lamaism because of the growing influence of Tibet among the Mongols who, though driven out of China, were an ever present danger at the frontiers, and the Mings did not wish to aggravate the trouble by disrespecting Lamaism. Anyway, it is interesting to note that when the Jesuit Ricci came to China in the sixteenth century, he found that the main religion in China he had to contend with was Buddhism and not Confucianism or Taoism.

In 1644 the Ming dynasty collapsed before the Manchus, and China again came under foreign rule. The Manchus, as a rule, were never deep in religion; individual emperors professed Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism as they liked but generally all kept up the ancient Chinese notion that the emperor was the patron of all religions in the empire. The Manchus too, in due course, went the way of all empires, but with their disappearance the history of China enters its modern phase with which we are not here concerned.

With the passing of the T'angs direct contact between India and China practically ceased. The Muslims dominated the important land route through Central Asia, and the ancient route by way of Upper Burma fell into disuse. The dominance of the eastern seas first passed to the Arabs

and then to Europeans and in the general isolation of India, the link with China was also cut.

The most important feature of Sino-Indian relations is that though both the countries were practically on the same level of civilisation, the cultural flow had always been one way, ie: from India to China. We have seen that a good number of Indians travelled to China and Chinese to India but neither Confucian nor Taoist ideals were ever preached in India. Indian scholars in China do not seem to have cared to study Taoism or Confucianism. King Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa (Assam), who reigned in the seventh century of the Christian era, is said to have evinced some interest in Taoism and is even credited with having obtained a Sanskrit translation of *Tao-te-ching*, but this seems to have made no impression in India. Indians have always been more anxious to teach than to learn.

#### CHINESE BUDDHISM

While in the countries of South East Asia both Buddhism and Brahminism exerted their influence, in China only Buddhism could make headway. China had already developed her own social theories and laws, and as such neither the Code of Manu nor the Brahmanic notion of caste found any favour in China. As a rule, Mahayana Buddhism alone was able to spread to China and the countries that came under her cultural dominance. Yet it was not the Mahayana of India, in its original form, that was transplanted to China and had its growth there. Apart from indigenous factors, Central Asian and Persian influences were as marked in Chinese Buddhism as Indian. I cannot do better than quote Sir Charles Eliot as to the extent and nature of these influences: "One of the Turkish Sutras discovered at Turfan contains a discourse of the Buddha to the merchants Trapussa and Bhallika who are described as Turks, and Indra is called Kormusta, that is

Hormuzd..... In another, Brahma is called Asura, identified as the Iranian deity Zervan..... In these instances, no innovation of doctrine is implied but when the world of spirits and man becomes Central Asian instead of Indian, it is only natural that the doctrine too should take on some local colour.

"Thus the dated inscription of the temple erected in Turfan in A. D. 469 is a mixture of Chinese ideas, both Confucian and Taoist, with Indian..... Even more remarkable is the admixture of Buddhism and Manichaeism. The discoveries made in Central Asia make intelligible the Chinese edict of 739 which accuses the Manichaeans of falsely taking the name of Buddhism and deceiving the people. This is not surprising for Mani seems to have taught that Zoroaster, Buddha and Christ had preceded him as Apostles, and in Buddhist countries his followers naturally adopted words and symbols familiar to the people: Thus, Manichaen deities are represented like Bodhisattvas, sitting cross-legged on a lotus; Mani receives the epithet Julai or Thathgatha; the construction and phraseology of Manichaen books resemble those of a Buddhist Sutra. In some ways the association of Taoism and Manichaeism was even closer, for the Hu-hua-ching identified Buddha with Lao Tse and Mani, and two Manichaen books have passed into the Taoist Canon.

"Nestorian Christianity also existed in the Tarim basin and became prominent in the seventh century. This agrees with the record of its introduction into China by A-lo-pen in 635 A. D. almost simultaneously with Zoroastrianism. Fragments of the New Testament have been found at Turfan belonging mostly to the ninth century, and one to the fifth. The most interesting document for the history of Nestorianism is still the monument discovered at Si-ngan-fu, and commonly called the Nestorian

stone. It bears a long inscription partly in Chinese and partly in Syriac composed by a foreign priest called Adam or in Chinese King Tsing giving a long account of the history and doctrines of Nestorianism..... It is interesting to find that King Tsing consorted with Buddhist priests and even set about translating a Sutra from the Hu language. Takakusu quotes a passage from one of the catalogues of the Japanese Tripitaka which states that he was a Persian and collaborated with a monk of Kapisa called Prajna."

Central Asia from very early times had been a meeting place of Asian cultures and during the centuries that followed the introduction of Buddhism in China the contact of this country was mainly with Central Asia. Hence it was not exactly the Indian form of the Mahayana that became popular in China, but a modified form from Central Asia and we find in the Buddhist pantheon of China deities little known or unknown to early Indian Mahayana. Kuan Yin, the female Bodhisatva is one of these; she seems to be, however, of Chinese origin and not Central Asian. Amita-bha, the most important of the Dhyani Buddhas of the Far East, was known to India, but his Paradise and attendants owe much to Persian influences.

Four mountains are considered specially sacred to Buddhism in China, each pertaining to a particular Bodhisatva: Mt. Chiuhua of Kshitigarbha, Mt. Putu (Potalaka) of Avalokitesvara, Mt. Omei of Samantabhadra and Mt. Wutai of Manjusri, and many pilgrims from all over the Buddhist world including India used to visit these four mounts. Mt. Wutai especially was of particular importance, and it is even thought that Manjusri is of Chinese origin.

While dealing with Chinese Buddhism it is impossible not to mention something of the prodigious Buddhist literature China has built up and preserved. From the

time of Kasyapa Matanga, learned scholars, both Indian and Chinese, have laboured on the work of translation; the Chinese have been a nation of literary men and we have seen that pilgrims like Fa Hien, Huien Tsang and I-Ching spent practically all their lives in collecting original works from all the countries of the Buddhist world and translating them into Chinese. In addition to these translations, commentaries and even original works in Chinese by eminent writers and saints were reckoned worthy of inclusion in the body of sacred literature. Mahayana Buddhism, as we have seen, did not fix the canon as Hinayana did, but kept it open to receive revelations, and as such the Chinese Canon had a growth of centuries.

Yet, in 518 A. D. the emperor Wu Ti thought it desirable to collect and classify the works extant in his time. His collection contained some 2213 works, and was called Tripitaka, following the convention of the Pali Canon, but was actually classified under four heads: 1) Sutra, 2) Vinaya, 3) Abhidharma and 4) Miscellaneous. The last category included original Chinese works and certain translations. Out of the 2213 works of the first collection, only 276 are now extant.

Eleven more collections of the Tripitaka were made, the last in 1735-37 after which revelation stopped and the canon was closed. The latest catalogue of the scriptures, compiled by Bunyiu Nanjo and published in 1893, lists 1662 works only. In spite of the fact that a great many ancient Chinese works perished in the womb of time, China has preserved a great body of Indian literature in translations without which we would never have known of the existence of the originals in Sanskrit.

A peculiarity of Far Eastern Buddhism was that when sects developed, each one considered a particular text as its main scripture. But with the passage of time and

during the periods of tribulation when Buddhism had to contend with Confucianism and Taoism, sectarian differences became less marked, and at present Buddhism in China is mainly divided into Lamaism and other sects numbering about twelve. But two or three sects may share the same monastery and live in perfect amity, sectarian differences being considered as individual predilection for certain patron saints or scriptures.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### TIBET

BUDDHISM had spread to many lands and adopted varied garbs to suit the different conditions existing in foreign regions but nowhere did it assume such fantastic forms as in Tibet. The love of the grotesque and the mysterious, terror-inspiring Tantric symbolism, the wielding by hierarchs of political power, the universal fear of evil spirits and the weird rituals practised to scare them little differing from the devil dances of South India and Ceylon, all this makes the Buddhism of Tibet appear something very different from what one associates with the mild doctrines and sweet reasonableness of the Buddha who had always advocated the Middle Way in doctrine as well as in practice.

Yet Lamaism, as Tibetan Buddhism is known because of the dominating influence of Lamas or priests, was founded in Tibet by an Indian scholar and saint who had studied at Nalanda, though the Tibetan flair for the weird and the grotesque had added much to what was imported from India.

When exactly the Tibetans, who are racially allied to the Burmans and certain peoples now inhabiting the Himalayan regions, settled down in Tibet is not known. From time immemorial ancient Tibet had lived in practical isolation, cut off from India by the Himalayas and from China and Central Asia by the peculiarities of the terrain that made access to the high tableland extremely difficult. Besides, Tibet had nothing to attract an ambitious invader; neither riches nor culture nor vast populations that could be enslaved. So the country, sparsely populated, lived her own isolated life till about the seventh century of the Christian era when she became powerful enough to cultivate matrimonial, if not political and cultural relations, with civilised neighbours. For king Srong-tsan-gam-po, who

ascended the throne in 629 A. D. is said to have married two ladies, one from India and the other from China. The ladies were obviously Buddhists; seeing that Tibet, their country of adoption, followed the primitive Bon religion while all civilised nations of Asia considered Buddhism as the most important international religion in the world, they prevailed upon their husband to get the Tibetan court and people acquainted with the religion of the Buddha. Srong-tsan-gam-po, who wished to expand the power of Tibet and make her one of the leading nations of Asia closed in with the proposal of his wives and sent to India a worthy named Thonmi Sanbhota to study Buddhism. Thonmi, while studying religion in India, realised the difficulty of conveying Indian religious ideas to Tibetans who had no written language; so he first adapted the Indian script for writing Tibetan and took it to his king as a preliminary step towards introducing Buddhism to Tibet.

For about another century we hear nothing more about Tibetan interest in Buddhism. Probably, the Shamans or priests of the Bon religion, did not like the doctrines of Buddhism and objected to it. Anyway, Srong-tsan-gam-po and his two queens are revered in Tibet as the first patrons of Buddhism, and worshipped as incarnations of Avalokitesvara and Tara.

#### PADMASAMBHAVA

The next important figure in Indo-Tibetan history was king Khri-sron-lde-btsan who ruled Tibet in the middle of the eighth century. Tibet had, by now, become a powerful state, the most powerful, in fact, in the Tarim Basin not only able to check the nomads but dictate terms to the kingdoms of Central Asia and even to China. She waged

successful war with China and obliged her to pay tribute for a time. Khri-sron-lde-btsan, not wishing to lag behind other advanced nations of Asia, decided to establish Buddhism as the state religion of Tibet. Hence he invited an Indian celebrity named Santarakshita to his court and requested him to organise Buddhism on a firm footing. But Santarakshita found himself unequal to the task; he was more of a scholar than a missionary and organiser, and he requested the king to send for Padma-sambhava who had risen to fame in East India as a scholar, proselytizer and an energetic organiser.

We know very little about the true facts of Padma-sambhava's biography as it has become difficult to delineate his personality from the myths and fables Tibetan imagination has woven round him. It would appear he was a native of Udayana, in the north west of India, but because of the Muslim invasion and the general decay of Buddhism in these regions, he had migrated to East India. Brahminism, all over India, was fast absorbing Buddhism and energetic Buddhists were making desperate efforts to popularise their religion by sacrificing many of its cherished ideals. We find Buddhist doctors of this age like Amogha, Vajrabodhi and Padmasambhava acting with a zeal comparable to that of the Jesuits of the Counter Reformation. Though Buddhism had lost ground in the Panjab and was steadily receding to the east, in Bengal and Bihar it was still flourishing, and Nalanda had retained its intellectual supremacy. Padmasambhava studied at Nalanda, but a scholastic life did not hold him long. He was attracted by the Tantric and mystic schools of Buddhism then prevalent in Bengal. After mastering the mysteries of these cults, he is credited with having declared it as his life mission to convert to Buddhism all foreign countries then known to him and then return to his native land Udayana to teach the Law anew to his countrymen. It was while Padmasambhava was thus planning the conversion of the whole world that the invitation

of Khri-sron-lde-btsan reached him. He immediately accepted the invitation.

Padmasambhava before proceeding to Tibet seems to have made a study of the religion and genius of the Tibetans. The indigenous Bon religion had, as its central doctrine, a firm belief that all human ills were caused by the activities of evil spirits of weird and monstrous shapes, and the Shamans had, in fact, organised themselves to wage a never ending war against the spirit world by magic, spells and rituals. And Padmasambhava realised that any man who claimed power over spirits was likely to get an easy hearing in Tibet, whatever other doctrines he professed.

Hence Padmasambhava came to Tibet not as a lone missionary preaching humility and the virtues of contemplation and Ahimsa, but as a powerful wizard accompanied by a number of Yoginis or female companions, commanding a host of demons more terrible and fearsome than those of Tibet. He was received with great respect by the court and the people, and he moved about Tibet as a great magician, the dread of all demons. He was reputed to be a master of the mysterious Bruhz language, the terror of all evil spirits.

In Tibet Padmasambhava discovered that through constant war against evil spirits the Tibetans had developed a genius for organisation and discipline, and he founded a priestly hierarchy as the mainstay of Buddhism in Tibet. He built the monastery of Samye, about thirty miles from Lhasa. This first important Buddhist establishment in Tibet was constructed on the model of the famous monastery of Odantapuri in Bengal, and Santarakshita was made its abbot. It soon rose as a centre of learning and attracted monks from India and Central Asia. Padmasambhava, among other things, is said to have introduced the worship of Mara, the arch-enemy of the

Buddha into Tibet; the idea was probably inspired by the fact that Mara had under his charge an ill-looking army of formidable demons who could be used for fighting the evil spirits of Tibet.

It is clear that we have a distorted picture of Padmasambhava, as the Tibetans painted him as a man after their own heart. He could not have been a mere exorcist and wizard. No Indian has ever achieved fame by mere wizardry. A student of Nalanda and a widely travelled man, it is difficult to believe that Padmasambhava was only concerned with magic and scaring away evil spirits. Anyway no name is held in greater honour in Tibet than that of Padmasambhava, and he is generally known as *the Guru*.

After establishing Lamaism, Padmasambhava is said to have disappeared from Tibet, leaving twenty five disciples to propagate the faith. These men by vigorous efforts converted a large number of Tibetans to Buddhism, built several monasteries and translated many Sanskrit works into Tibetan and by the time of Ralpachan, the grandson of Khri-sron-lde-btsan, Buddhism became, more or less, the established religion of Tibet. Ralpachan was an ardent Buddhist. His brother Lang-dar-ma, however, was partial to the old religion; he headed a political faction, successfully revolted against Ralpachan, and after executing him started a vigorous persecution of Buddhists. "Monasteries were destroyed, books burnt, Indian monks driven out of the country and many Lamas were compelled to become hunters or butchers." This persecution was, however, short lived, and after three years the wicked king was assassinated by a Lama. The main theme of the religious drama enacted in several Tibetan monasteries at present is of this phase of the history of Lamaism.

## ATISA AND THE SECOND PHASE OF LAMAISM

After the assassination of Lang-dar-ma, Buddhism became the national religion of Tibet, and an era of active Indo-Tibetan contact was ushered in. Young Lamas were sent to India for studying Buddhism at first hand and bringing about reforms in Lamaism. The main centres of learning to which Tibetans went were the monasteries of Odantapuri and Vikramasila in Bengal, both strongholds of Tantric Buddhism. Nalanda by now was waning in importance.

The most important Indian to visit Tibet after Padmasambhava was Atisa. He hailed from Bengal, and was ordained at Odantapuri; from here he travelled to Burma and after studying and preaching here for some time returned to Bengal. He was then appointed abbot of Vikramasila. This was a time of political disturbances in North India and many monks found in Tibet a more congenial atmosphere for the practice of religion, and migrated. And Atisa was induced to visit Tibet in 1038. He settled down here and till his death which occurred fifteen years later he worked tirelessly for the reform of Tibetan religion. Atisa was, no doubt a Tantric master, and one of the most thorough-going Tantric cult, known as Kalachakra, was founded by him; yet the Tantric cults of Bengal seem to have been an improvement on those of Tibet and Atisa is generally known in Tibet as a reformer. Atisa is reputed to have introduced a new calendar in Tibet and is remembered as having ushered in the second phase of Lamaism as Padmasambhava did the first.

After Atisa's death, there was considerable political disturbances in Tibet, and several kingdoms rose and fell. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the whole country was torn by civil wars, but Lamaism gained considerable strength by these political misfortunes of Tibet. The monasteries, because of the solidity of their

structure and the sanctity they enjoyed, became armed castles and the abbots rose as military chieftains as well as religious heads. The most important of these armed monasteries was the Sakya; the abbots were of royal blood, did not observe celibacy, but produced a line of ecclesiastical statesmen who were in power in Tibet when the Mongol outburst took place. The Mongols respected the Lamas and Chengiz, it seems, did not invade Tibet. The Lamas' fame as wizards generally impressed the Mongols and the head of the Sakya monastery, an abbot named Sakya Pandita, was actually summoned to the Mongol Court in 1246 and was credited with having cured the emperor Guyuk Khagan of an illness. Sakya Pandita seems to have made a great impression among the Mongols; for Bashpa, the adviser of Kublai Khan (see page 301) was a nephew of this Sakya Pandita.

Anyway the active contact between India and Tibet may be said to have ceased with the political confusion that followed the death of Atisa. In India, Buddhism was fast vanishing under the double onslaught of Islam and Brahminism; Tibetan integrity was getting undermined by extensive civil wars and the country was coming under Chinese dominance to ward off which she was allying herself with the Mongols.

#### TSONG-KHA-PA AND THE YELLOW SECT

It is significant that the third era of Lamaism was ushered in not by an Indian, as the first and second, but by a Tibetan named Tsong-kha-pa. He is officially recognized as the last reformer of the Tibetan church and the founder of Lamaism as it exists at present. Tibetan legends say that he was ordained at the age of seven and during his tonsure a tree sprang up from the discarded hair. He studied at the Tibetan monasteries of Sakya, Dikung and Lhasa. From the close parallel Tsong-kha-pa's organisation of Lamaism bears to the Roman Catholic hierarchism, it is even argued by certain scholars that he had as

instructors European missionaries. In fact Lamaism bears closer affinity to Catholicism than to any other religion in its hierarchical organisation, the dogma of the Infallibility of the Pope having a parallel in the belief of successive incarnations of Avalokitesvara as the Dalai Lama.

Tsong-kha-pa brought about many reforms in the Tibetan Church. He made monastic discipline stricter and enforced celibacy on the clergy. Tantric rituals of an objectionable nature were forbidden, though the main ideals of the Tantras were recognized in principle. This reformed Lamaism was known as Gelugpa or Yellow Church as yellow was the favourite colour of the adherents of Tsong-kha-pa, while the older persuasion retained its red hats and was, on that account, known as the Red Church though its proper designation is Nying-ma-pa or the Old One.

Tsong-kha-pa, however, did not introduce the doctrine of successive incarnations with which Lamaism has now been identified, but ruled on his own personal merits. But on Tsong-kha-pa's death in 1417, his disciple Mkhas-grub-rje, founded the monastery of Tashilhumpo, became its addot and claimed to be an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha. The head of the Gelugpa was not, however, Mkhas-grub-rje but Geden-dub, a nephew of Tsong-kha-pa, resident at Lhasa. When Mkhas-grub-rje claimed to be an incarnation of Amitabha, Geden-dub declared that he was an incarnation of the Bodhisatva Avalokitesvara. The claims of both were generally accepted in Tibet and Mongolia. From now on, the Panchen Lama, as the abbot of Tashilhumpo was designated, came to be considered as an incarnation of Amitabha, and the Grand Lama, the head of the church at Lhasa, that of Avalokita. The Chinese emperor Cheng Hug (1465-88) officially recognized the claim of these sees and the idea has continued to the present day.



The title of Dalai Lama by which the head of the Tibetan church is now widely known was awarded to the third Grand Lama of Lhasa by the Mongol Chief, Altan Khan. The Mongols, as we have seen, were driven out of China by the indigenous Ming dynasty, but they were not annihilated. They returned to their old haunts and tribal ways, but the achievements of Chengiz and Kublai were always fresh in their mind. Altan Khan, the chief of the Tumed, saw visions of Kublai's empire in China and thought a Tibetan-Mongol alliance would enable him to realise his dreams of re-conquering China. Accordingly, he invited the third Grand Lama Sod-nams (1543-86) to Mongolia. A grand reception was accorded to him and a congregation of practically all the Mongol tribes was held near Lake Kokonor. "The Lama appeared before the astonished Mongols as Avalokita and his horse's hoofs showed the six mystic syllables Om Mani Padme Hum. The Lama bestowed on the Khan high sounding titles and received himself the epithet Dalai or Talai, the Mongol word for sea, signifying metaphorically vast extent and profundity."

This Tibetan-Mongol alliance, however, made China apprehensive of the intentions of Tibet, and from now on we find increasing Chinese interference in Tibetan politics and a tendency on the part of China to treat Tibet as a vassal when she was not powerful enough to exert her independence, a policy that has come down to the present day. In Tibet politics and religion are inextricably mixed and Chinese political interference had its repercussions on religious dogmas too. This was particularly the case in the matter of the selection of the Dalai Lamas.

The dogma of successive incarnation meant that the soul of a Dalai Lama, on death, gets reborn in a child and a conclave of Lamas headed by Panchen Lama decides which infant, born shortly after the Dalai Lama's death, should succeed him. The Panchen Lama, as a rule, works as regent for the Dalai Lama during the latter's minority.

Now it happened that on the death of Sod-nams, his soul transmigrated into Yon Tan, a great grandson of Altan Khan who had given Sod-nams his title of Dalai Lama. This naturally alarmed the Chinese and the emperor issued peremptory orders to Tibetans in general and Lamas in particular that the souls of Dalai Lamas should not get reborn in Mongolia.

Lozang the fifth Dalai Lama was a man of energy and ability and it was due to his sagacity and political acumen that the Dalai Lama's position was firmly established in Tibet. He built the Potala monastery which has since remained the seat of Dalai Lamas. During his reign, there was a split in the Church and China even threatened to annihilate the Yellow Church, but Lozang, by enlisting the support of the Mongols, was able to establish himself as the undisputed master and king of Tibet. Lozang died in 1680.

These and subsequent events, however, fall within the sphere of Chinese and Central Asian history and not of Indo-Tibetan. For our purpose Atisa may be said to mark the last link in Indo-Tibetan relations.

#### LAMAISM: MAIN FEATURES

Lamaism, though Buddhist in inspiration, has closer affinities to Tantric Hinduism. Its emphasis on the terror aspect of the deity, its preference for goddesses, its love of the grotesque and fearsome in art and ritual, all suggest cults connected with Kali and other terror aspects of Durga, and of the destructive forms of Shiva. Many Indian deities appear in the Tibetan pantheon under the same names or slightly different names. Thus, Ganesha is a popular deity of Tibetan Buddhism. Before Bashpa's birth, Ganesha is said to have appeared before his father and showed him the whole land of Tibet and prophesied that his son would be the virtual ruler of the country. Mahakala, obviously a form of Shiva, was the favourite

deity of Bashpa who popularised his worship among the Mongols.

An important feature of Tibetan iconography is the emphasis given to sex. Like all Tantric cults, mystic Lamaism has given sex an exceptionally high place; the Adi Buddha or Primal Buddha in union with his Sakti, Prajna, is believed to have given rise to the phenomenal world. In India, however, art generally depicts the more pleasing aspects of love in the Maithuna figures, but in Tibet the power aspect of sex is emphasised, and the Yab-yun figures of Tibet are fearsome in comparison to the Maithuna figures of Indian shrines, Brahmanic or Buddhist. As a rule the Tibetan predilection for the grotesque and the terrible, a legacy, no doubt, of the Bon religion, tends to make a religious establishment in Tibet look like a pandemonium of raging fiends.

In reality, however, most of the ill-looking figures of the Tibetan pantheon are benign deities who assume formidible forms for the destruction of the powerful fiends that molest the human population of Tibet. The idea will be clearer when we consider that the humane Vishnu of Hinduism in his incarnation as Narasimha or man-lion appears as one of the most fearsome work of imagination. Similarly, to give but one illustration, the figure of Yamantaka (Destroyer of Yama), the ferocious representation of the many-armed deity one sees in Tibetan art, is only an irritable form of the genial Bodhisatva Manjusri, the patron of arts and letters, assumed for the destruction of Yama, god of death, whose depredations in a particular phase of Tibetan history tended to depopulate the land through an epidemic. It may be recalled that Hinduism has a legend which purports to say that Shiva once killed Yama who molested a devotee of his.

Another important deity of the Tibetan pantheon is the goddess Tara. Like Durga of the Hindu pantheon she has many forms each distinguished by a particular colour.

The Green Tara is the most popular of her forms. The White Tara is a favourite of the Mongols who believed that the Tsar of Russia was her successive incarnation. In one of her forms Tara is known as Bhrikuti, a dark blue, angry, ferocious goddess. Pisachi (demoness) is also a manifestation of Tara. In her popular forms, however, Tara is generally represented as the dutiful spouse of Avalokita, much in the same way as Parvati is conceived as a devoted wife of Shiva by the Hindus.

An account of Lamaism will be hardly complete without a description of the celebrated Mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum". Its origin is obscure and meaning unknown, though the formula is generally translated as 'Jewel in the Lotus' which, however, does not take us very far. The formula is at times repeated by word of mouth, but the most common form of acquiring merit is by writing it on parchment or paper, inserting it in a revolving barrel with a handle and turning it endlessly; these barrels are known as prayer wheels and are of various sizes to contain anything from a single parchment of the Om Mani Padme Hum formula to whole libraries containing meritorious scriptures. "In Tibet this form of devotion is a national mania. People carry small prayer wheels in their hands as they walk, and place large ones in rivers to be turned by the current."

From what one knows of the religious trend in Tibet, one is inclined to think that the Tibetans are not interested in literature. But actually, Tibet has produced a religious literature almost as bulky as that of China. Whatever may have been popular ideas of religion in Tibet, her monasteries had all along been great centres of learning to which scholars from India and other countries went to acquire knowledge as well as to translate the scriptures.

The general collection of Tibetan religious literature falls into two main divisions called Kanjur and Tanjur. These are mostly translations from Sanskrit works. Kanjur

is the more esteemed of the two, and though not considered infallible, stands in about the same relation to Tanjur as the Srutis to Smritis. The Kanjur, generally speaking, contains the canon proper while in the Tanjur is included such secular subjects as grammar, logic, medicine and even the *Meghaduta* of Kalidasa.

The Kanjur contains some 108 volumes divided into seven parts. The Tanjur consists of 225 volumes. Both together are, however, called the Tripitaka, in keeping with the ancient and orthodox division of the Buddhist scriptures.

The Tibetan scriptures are sealed books not released for public circulation, especially those pertaining to the esoteric cults and doctrines. The general trend of texts whose contents are known would suggest the same predilections in literature as in art and beliefs, and shows leanings to extreme forms of Tantric practices. There is, however, one exception. For the songs of Milrepa, the great wandering saint of medieval Tibet, breathe the spirit of Indian poet saints like Manikka Vasagar, Tukaram and Chaitanya, and are happily free from the erotic leanings that mark the mystic musings of the generality of Lamas.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### KOREA AND JAPAN

BUDDHISM is a living force both in Korea and Japan, but these countries, like Viet Nam, received their veneer of Indian culture from China and not direct from India. It was Buddhism modified by Chinese genius that spread to Korea and Japan, and neither country had cared to cultivate direct contact with India. Barring references in literature to some stray pilgrim who went to India, there were no organised pilgrimages to Buddha Land from either Korea or Japan, and no scholar or saint of repute cared to come to India to study Buddhism in the land of its origin. Similarly, no great Indian missionary or savant travelled to Korea or Japan to preach the Law or to translate the scriptures. As a rule, both Korea and Japan looked to China as the mother of civilisation and were content to import and adopt what culture they found in China. As such the spread of Buddhism and its art and literature to Korea and Japan does not, strictly speaking, fall within the scope of this book but some mention of it is warranted by the fact that the fountain head of this stream was India; it is like a river that flowed from India to a Chinese lake and from here started fresh streams to Korea and Japan both of which countries generally considered the lake as the source of the rivers.

Buddhism was introduced into Korea in 372 A. D. from China along with Confucianism. In the early stages, Buddhism was the more popular because of its international temper and appeal to the masses; Confucianism was considered aristocratic and more suited to the court and its ceremonials. In course of time, however, monasteries, as in Tibet, began to dabble in politics and in times of civil wars degenerated into armed camps, and the abbots became military chiefs. But unlike in Tibet, they were unsuccessful in establishing a regular theocracy, and

their political intrigues led to Confucianism gaining supremacy. By the time of the Mongol invasion of China, Confucianism had become the dominant force in Korea. The monks were held "responsible for the evils of the time, for the continual feuds, exactions and massacres," and Buddhism was steadily falling into disrepute. In the thirteenth century Korea was, however, invaded by Kublai, and Buddhism again obtained supremacy under Mongol patronage,

But with the defeat of the Mongols by the Mings, the inevitable happened. The Mongol dynasty was overthrown and replaced by an indigenous one. Buddhism as the religion of the hated Mongols, was not only neglected but actively persecuted and Confucianism enjoyed the favour of the court and the nobility. "By about the beginning of the sixteenth century, the monasteries in the capital and all cities were closed and this is why Korean monasteries are all in the country, and often in almost inaccessible mountains. It is only since the Japanese occupation that temples have been built in towns.

Korean Confucians did not, however, prove better than the monks and in course of time the Confucians themselves started a civil war. But when the Japanese attacked Korea in 1592, all factions, including the Buddhists, rose against the foreigners in a national movement. The monks are said to have fought under their abbots against the Japanese, and it is significant that when the treaty between Korea and Japan was concluded, it was negotiated by a Korean monk.

With all this, however, Buddhism never regained its lost hold on the people of Korea till 1710 when the Japanese invaded and occupied Korea. The Japanese, as a rule, were more favourable to Buddhism than to Confucianism and under their patronage Buddhism started

a revival. But this development is more or less modern and need not be dealt with here.

Korea, though it did not produce anything outstanding in art, literature or doctrine but generally copied China, is important in one respect. She was mainly responsible for introducing Chinese culture to Japan.

#### JAPAN

The official date of the introduction of Buddhism to Japan is 552 A. D. It came by way of Korea along with Confucianism and Taoism. Buddhism, however, began to enjoy greater favour in Japan as the Japanese developed political animosity against China; for both Confucianism and Taoism were linked with Chinese nationalism whereas Buddhism was considered as much foreign to China as to Japan. In course of time, Buddhism got so blended with Shintoism, the national religion of Japan, that the Buddhists took Shinto shrines under their charge, and both the religions became, more or less, complementary to one another.

The Japanese are noted for their genius for improving upon what they borrow from others, and this was the case with the Chinese Buddhism imported into Japan via Korea. There are at present more than twelve distinct sects of Buddhism in Japan, each with its own special scriptures. The sects that worship Amitabha Buddha and believe in his Paradise, the Pure Land Schools as they are called, are more numerous than any other, but the most important sect may be said to be the Zen, founded by Boddhidharma (Ch'an) and introduced into Japan in the seventh century under the T'angs. It may seem strange that this meditative school should have appealed to so active and energetic a people as the



Japanese. But the term 'meditative' is a misnomer for Zen. Though mysticism has a good part in it inasmuch as it rejects the conventionalities of regular religion and appeals to the mind rather than to outside aid, the pragmatic genius of the Japanese moulded it to a practical and martial model; for the Bushido, as the Japanese code of chivalry is known, is based on Zen.

Thus Japan may be said to have produced some of the best flowers of transplanted Buddhism, though the folk and the generality of the population find in it a suitable mixture of Shintoism and priestcraft with a dash of the familiar Buddhist doctrines.

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